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THE ENVOYS OF THE HIDDEN IMAM: RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND THE
POLITICS OF THE TWELVER OCCULTATION DOCTRINE

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EDMUND HAYES

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قال ابو عبد الله [الصادق] : إن من بقاء المسلمين وبقاء الإسلام أن تصير الأموال عند من يعرف [فيها] الحق ويصنع المعروف، وإن من فناء الإسلام وفناء المسلمين أن تصير الأموال في ايدي من لا يعرف فيها الحق ولا يصنع فيها المعروف.

Abū ‘Abd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] said: If wealth remains in the hands of those who know how to use it righteously, and do good deeds with it, then it is to the continuation of the Muslims and of Islam.

But it is to the destruction of Islam and the Muslims.if wealth falls into the hands of those who do not know how to use it righteously, and do not do good deeds with it.

– Kulayni, *Kāfi*

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Abstract

In 260 AH/ 874 CE, the Eleventh Imam of the Imami Shi‘a died, precipitating a succession crisis that was ultimately solved by replacing this line of living, visible leaders with a messianic figure, hidden from humankind who will return at the end of time to rule in peace and justice. This dissertation seeks to answer why this the doctrine of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam was successful, among all the possible solutions to the crisis in the Imamate that were proposed in the first few years after the death of the Eleventh Imam. I show how the financial-sacral institutions that had increasingly surrounded the Imams and mediated their presence to the community in the pre-Occultation era came to replace the authority of the Imam after 260/874. I analyze the textual sources for the earliest phase of development of Twelver Occultation ideas against the backdrop of the contestation of authority between members of the family of the Imam (especially the mother and brother of the Eleventh Imam) as well as the household retainers of the Imam, and the agents (*wakīls*) of the financial-sacral system. These contestations clustered around a number of key events, the meaning of which were shifted and erased according to the requirements of later doctrine, but which still leave residual traces throughout our sources. Of particular importance was the succession dispute over the inheritance the Eleventh Imam, claims to which were associated with the spiritual legacy of the Imamate. The success of the Imam’s dissolute brother, Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, in winning the inheritance dispute led to a split in the Imami elite between those who followed Ja‘far, and the financial agents who opposed Ja‘far and claimed to preserve the legacy of the old Imam on behalf of the hidden Twelfth Imam, in particular the obscure agent Ḥājiz b. Yazīd. A further crisis ensued after the deaths of the old guard. However, quasi-Imamic authority was gradually arrogated to a single pre-eminent representative of the class of financial-sacral agents of the Imam: the so-called ‘Envoy’ (Ar.

saḡīr), Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī (d. 305/917). His authority was contested both by members of the old guard of fiscal agents, and also by charismatic *bābs* associated with the gnostic tradition.

The authority of Abū Ja‘far was institutionalized when his death gave rise to a succession process, through which Ibn Rawḡ al-Nawbakhtī laid claim to his legacy as the Envoy after him. Ibn Rawḡ’s authority as Envoy was challenged by a number of difficulties including difficulty in collecting the canonical taxes, and the claims to spiritual authority of various gnostic *bābs* whose radical claims upset various members of the Imami elite. Ultimately, such difficulties prevented the stable institutionalization of the office of Envoy, and soon after Ibn Rawḡ’s tenure of office, the Imami elite declared the end of the institution of Envoy, asserting that anyone who claimed to be the direct representative for the Imam was an imposter. However, though leadership of the Imami community then passed to the more diffuse epistemic authority of the scholars, the legacy of the Envoys became an important theological support, and founding myth for the Twelver Shi‘i community. Meanwhile, the messy conflicts of the early Occultation period came to be largely erased by the canonical doctrine of the “Four Praised Envoys” of the Hidden Imam.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations of honorific formulas in Arabic

(T): *ta'ālā*, meaning “He is most high” used for God

(AJ): *'Azza wa jalla*, meaning, “He is glorified and great” used for God

(SAAS): *Ṣallā allāh 'alayhi wa sallam*, meaning “may God pray for him and grant him peace” used for the Prophet

(SAAA): *Ṣallā allāh 'alayhi wa ālihi*, “may God pray for him and his family” used for the Prophet

(SAA) *Ṣalawāt allāh 'alayhi*, meaning “God’s prayers be upon him” used for Imams or prophets

(AS): *'Alayhi al-salām*, meaning “upon him be peace” (or dual or plural forms) used for Imams

(QAR): *Qaddasa allāh rūḥahu*, meaning “may God sanctify his soul” (or dual or plural forms) used for the Envoys

(RAA): *Raḍiya allāh 'anhu*, meaning “may God be pleased with him” (or dual or plural forms), used for wakīls, Envoys and other companions and followers of the Imams

(RA): *Raḥimahu allāh*, meaning “may God have mercy upon him” (or dual or plural forms) used for someone who has passed away

Abbreviations of cited works

BSOAS: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies

EI2: Encyclopedia of Islam, second edition

EI3: Encyclopedia of Islam, third edition

EIr: Encyclopedia Iranica

EQ: Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān

IJMES: International Journal of Middle East Studies

JAOS: Journal of the American Oriental Society.

JNES: Journal of Near Eastern Studies

JRAS: Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.

JSAI: Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam

Note on transliteration

I adhere to IJMES transliteration guidelines, except that I transliterate all names and book titles fully, with the following exceptions:

Names

I keep full transliteration of names, though I do drop the definite article, unless it is part of a longer construction. Thus, I use 'Askarī and Imam 'Askarī, but also al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, and Mufīd, but also al-Shaykh al-Mufīd

Example Arabic words for which I have used have standard anglicized versions:

'Abbasid, not 'Abbāsīd

Dinar and dirham

Hadith

Imam (not Imām)

Ismaili

Shi'a

Shi'i

Sunni

Example place names for which I have used have standard anglicized versions:

Baghdad

Kufa

Samarra (not Sāmarrā', or *Surra man ra'ā*)

Basra instead of Baṣra

Words I have anglicized, or have been anglicized by scholars in the field:

Wakīlate

Safirate

Fatḥite

Wāqifite

(When these words appear in their Arabic form, however, they are fully transliterated and italicized.)

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Chapter 1: Introduction: The question, the field, sources and methodology

1.1 Overview

In the year 260 H/ 874 CE, the Imami¹ Shi'i community was struck by crisis. Their Eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-'Askarī,² died, apparently without an heir, and the community was wracked with division. Numerous solutions to this crisis in leadership were proposed, but it took several decades for a firm consensus to develop around the idea of the existence a hidden Twelfth Imam. This Imam, it was believed, was the son of the Eleventh Imam, and he had been hidden away from the 'Abbasid Caliphs, who were eager to get their hands on the Child, just as Moses had been concealed from a tyrannical Pharaoh.

According to the canonical Twelver narratives which formed over the next century, the Hidden Imam was supported by a sequence of deputies, known as the Four Agents (*wakīl*), the Four Deputies (*nā'ib*) or the Four Envoys (*saḥr*). These men collected the canonical taxes due to the Imam, as well as issuing statements and answering legal and doctrinal questions on his behalf. In the traditional schema, the names of the canonical Four Envoys are as follows:

1. 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd (or Ḥafṣ b. 'Amr according to Kashshī) al-'Amrī (d. before 280/893)³
2. His son, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān al-'Amrī (d. 305/917)
3. Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī (d. 326/938)

¹ In what follows, I use the word 'Imami' to refer to any Shi'i who accepts the principle of *naṣṣ* Imamate, unlike the Zaydis, and in particular those followers of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq's who acknowledged the Imamate of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī up till his death in 260/874. I use the uncapitalized word 'twelver' to refer to those Imamis who came to accept the doctrine of the Twelve Imams, including the Nuṣayrīs. I use the capitalized word 'Twelver' to refer to the sect we recognize today as Twelvers, including their earlier canonical sources from the fourth/tenth century onwards.

² Meaning 'the one who lives in the military settlement (*'askar*) due to his prolonged enforced stay in Samarra.

³ See discussion of 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd's death date and the chronology of the early Occultation era in Chapter 6.

4. Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī⁴ (d. 328-9/940-1)

Verena Klemm, was the first to clearly challenge the traditional narrative of the Four Envoys in an article published in 1984. She argued that the office of Envoy only really came to exist with the tenure of Ibn Rawḥ, the third Envoy, who belonged to the prominent Baghdadi Nawbakhtī dynasty. Klemm suggests that the two first Envoys were slotted into the office only retrospectively:

All the information that can be found—or better: cannot be found—about the two Baghdādī *wukalā*, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd and Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī suggests that they were forced afterwards into the institution of the *sifāra* which, in order to be credible, had to begin as early as the death of the eleventh Imām.⁵

She goes on to speculate that, “it is not unthinkable that [Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī] and Ibn Rawḥ together with other leading members of the Nawbakhtīs... conspired to concoct the concept.”⁶

Klemm’s critique of the traditional narrative of the Envoys was a milestone, but this idea of the creation of the office of Envoy *ex nihilo*, by Ibn Rawḥ and his cronies is unsatisfactory. It still leaves a period of more than forty years in which the structures of authority in the Imami community are unexplained. My dissertation gives an account of the production of authority

⁴ There is no consensus about the correct vocalization of the name of the fourth Envoy. I follow Ghaemmaghami, who reads it as Samurī, after one of his ancestors whose name was al-Samur, meaning gum-acacia tree. “Seeing the Proof,” 147, n378. Traditional Twelver usage favors Samarrī, which Halm notes is “presumably a folk etymology called forth by the reminiscence of Sāmarrā.” Instead, based upon his perusal of Sam‘ānī’s *Ansāb* and Ṣuyūṭī’s *Lubb al-lubāb*, Halm maintains instead that “we must no doubt assume a vocalization of al-Simarrī after a place Simmar near Kashkar between Wāsiṭ and Baṣra.” Halm, *Shi‘ism*, 37 and 143, n16. In his *Divine Guide*, Amir-Moezzi uses both Sumirrī (111) and Simarrī (113). Abdelsater (“Dynamics,” 326) follows Jassim Hussain in using Sammarī. Jassim Hussain says that the name is derived from a location called of al-Sammar or al-Ṣaymar, situated in one of the districts of Baṣra, where the relatives of al-Sammarī used to live: *Occultation*, 133.

⁵ Verena Klemm, “The Four *sufarā*’ of the Twelfth Imām: On the Formative Period of the Twelver Shi‘a,” in *Shi‘ism*, edited by Etan Kohlberg (Aldershot, UK (2003): 149.

⁶ Klemm, “*Sufarā*’,” 150.

during this period of crisis, up until the establishment of the office of Envoy, and its demise sometime after the death of the last Envoy, al-Samurī in 328-9/940-1. While Klemm's point that the stories of the Envoys are heavily influenced by ideological agendas is certainly true, I do not accept that these reports were fabricated out of whole cloth. Instead, I argue that they preserve much material that was generated in response to events in the first decades after the Eleventh Imam's death. This material was certainly elaborated upon and distorted before it was finally preserved in hadith compilations of the fourth/tenth-sixth/twelfth centuries CE.

Given the distortions in our sources, then, how should we approach them? These hadith works are primarily designed to prove the existence of the Occultation of the Hidden Imam. In these works, reports in which people claim to have seen, heard or corresponded with the Hidden Imam are included *en masse*, in spite of numerous contradictions between narratives. The Envoys are prominent in their number. I have sifted through these reports in order to make sense of these contradictions and commonalities. In the dissertation I have aimed both to identify the core historical events, as well as showing how the reports developed and elaborated upon these events, to establish what would become the new foundational narratives of Twelver Shi'ism.

We can distinguish between a number of types of report contained in these works:

- Canonizing statements (for example lists of the Envoys)
- Heresiographical statements (for example lists of the theological factions amongst the Shi'a)
- Narrative reports
- Rescripts (*tawqī'*) of the Imam: that is, statements issued by the Hidden Imam, often in response to questions posed to him. These are often embedded in narrative reports.
- Biographical and bibliographical entries

- Theological and polemical tracts

In particular, if we separate the canonizing statements from reports which appear to narrate historical events, and pay close attention to the chronology of the sources, we can derive a very different narrative from the traditional Twelver narrative, without throwing the baby out with the bathwater and suggesting that anything that happened before the tenure of the Third Envoy is fabricated.

This method has allowed me to answer two key questions: “Why was the doctrine of the hidden Imam established?” and “What structures of authority succeeded the death of the 11th Imam?” These questions are intimately related.

There are two major sets of actors that determined the solution to the crisis:

1. The family of the Imams, from which future Imams would have to be chosen
2. The fiscal agents, the *wakīls*, who collected money, distributed gifts and blessings, and issued statements on behalf of the Imams. It is from the ranks of these *wakīls* that the role of the Envoy was to develop.

The crisis of the Occultation era was brought about by a crisis in the family of the Imams. After the Eleventh Imam’s death, there was no consensus about who should succeed him. Had this dispute remained within the family it might have been less damaging, but the brother and mother of the Eleventh Imam became embroiled in an ugly public disputation over the Imam’s inheritance. In addition, both the brother and mother appear to have made claims to be the true inheritors of the spiritual authority of the Imam. It is well known that the brother, known to Twelvers as Ja‘far ‘the Liar,’ claimed to be the Imam, and gained many followers, but even the mother, Ḥudayth is the focus of reports which say that she is “the one the Shi‘a turn to for

succor.” Our sources chastely remove most of the details of this dispute between Ja‘far the Liar and Hūdayth, but it clearly caused a great shock to the faithful, and undermined Ja‘far’s chances of winning over his opponents. However, if the problem had been swiftly resolved, it may not have caused so much confusion. But it dragged on. The inheritance dispute was not resolved for at least two years. After the old woman’s death Ja‘far tried to prevent her being buried in the house of the Imams alongside her son. Many refused to recognize Ja‘far, and no other viable candidate appeared.

Among those who opposed Ja‘far were a number of the fiscal agents of the Eleventh Imam who had begun to posit the existence of a successor who was in hiding. This is not so very surprising. Ja‘far had coveted the Imamate since before their father had died six years earlier, and had been feuding with his brother ever since.⁷ The fiscal agents could not easily transfer their allegiance after the Imam’s death.

The Shi‘a were left with three irrevocable facts, which, put together led naturally (though not inevitably) to the Occultation doctrine:

1. Firstly, the central, non-negotiable doctrine of the Imami Shi‘a was that the earth could at no time be devoid of an Imam. If there were only two people left on earth, one of them would have to be the Imam.
2. The fiscal agents refused to recognize Ja‘far as the Imam.
3. There were no other clearly viable candidates.

⁷ See Chapter 4 for details of Ja‘far’s early claim on the Imamate.

Therefore, for those who accepted that there *had to be* an Imam somewhere on the earth, at all times, it makes plain sense that this Imam must be a hidden or absent Imam. They did not have to reinvent the wheel to arrive at this conclusion. The way had been prepared for this idea several generations earlier: When the 7th Imam, Mūsā al-Kāzīm had died, a group of fiscal agents claimed that he was still alive, but was in Occultation, and they held on to the money they had collected in his name, refusing to give it up to the new candidate. The reports that this group, the *wāqifa*, generated to support their position were still circulating when the 11th Imam died, and were soon repurposed for the circumstances of the new Occultation. In addition, the gnostic *bābī* Shi‘a, who were probably a minority, but a creative minority, were influential upon the development of the Twelver Occultation from a different direction. They believed that the Imams and their *bābs*, or representatives, had a divine essence which belied their exterior appearance. This means that the nature of their Imams and *bābs* were not constrained by the mundane details of births and deaths, physical presence or absence. Significant among those who held these kinds of doctrines were the Nuṣayrīs, who were also active in contributing to the developing twelver Occultation doctrine. And so, while there was a great need to believe in a hidden Imam, given the absence of a viable visible candidate, there was also a reservoir of existence frameworks which could justify the idea of this hidden Imam.

As for the structures of authority during the early Occultation period, these are more obscure – in particular in the crucial transitional years following the Imam’s death – but we have many clues scattered through our sources. Knowing that there must have been an Imam somewhere, the fiscal agents attempted to maintain business as usual, in spite of resistance from a community in confusion. They attempted to continue collecting the canonical taxes, and issued responses to petitions and legal questions from the faithful. These early acts of crisis-

management became the foundation upon which the institutions and doctrines of the new Twelver community were developed. It is unclear at what stage the old Imam's agents claimed that they were in direct communication with the Hidden Imam. However, in 290/903, a generation after the 11th Imam's death, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī wrote in his *Kitāb al-tanbīh* that a group of the old Imam's companions had continued to be in communication with the Hidden Imam for twenty years, issuing his statements and collecting money in his name. After this they all died out but one, and when he died, he passed his authority down to a *hidden* agent, who continued to be in communication with the Hidden Imam, though there were no more statements being issued. Thus, more than twenty years after the death of the 11th Imam, we can perceive that another crisis had been precipitated, this time by the deaths of the fiscal agents who had claimed to be intermediaries with the Hidden Imam. Abū Sahl does not explicitly call it a crisis, but other sources speak explicitly of the absence of an intermediary with the Imam as a crisis.

It is from this second crisis that Abū Ja'far al-'Amrī, the second Envoy of the canonical sequence, emerged, reviving the institution of the *wakīl* as intermediary for the Hidden Imam, a precedent established by the old agents of the Eleventh Imam, as they tried to keep the community together. In contrast to Klemm's suggestion that Abū Ja'far's Envoyship was back-projected by the third envoy and his cronies, we must emphasize that Abū Ja'far's achievements are documented in some detail, albeit only in sources from the mid to late fourth/tenth century onwards. It is very unlikely that Ibn Rawḥ could have created the Envoyship in his image with no institutional precedents to rely on. What is more, there are several reports that state that the succession of Ibn Rawḥ to the Envoyship was contested by other candidates who were considered more suitable. This shows that there had been something real to succeed to. It is inconceivable that the faction of Ibn Rawḥ, in fabricating the idea of Envoy, should also have

fabricated reports suggesting that Ibn Rawḥ was not the most suitable Envoy to succeed Abū Ja‘far. Abū Ja‘far must have had a real, recognized position in the community, which generated expectations for his succession. Ibn Rawḥ then stepped into the shoes of Abū Ja‘far. Abū Ja‘far, before him, had likewise made use of the precedents set for him, though his task was made more difficult by the rupture after the deaths of all the old guard.

The achievements of Abū Ja‘far, though obscurely documented, are rather remarkable. He asserted leadership and promoted unity in the community following the deaths of the old guard who had defined the earliest phase of the Occultation. He started issuing rescripts again, and by the time he died, his role as leader of the embryonic Twelver community had become institutionalized enough that succession to his office was expected. Central to Abū Ja‘far’s claim to authority was the network of fiscal agents from whose ranks he and his father had sprung. He issued rulings to regulate the legal framework of this network, granting dispensations to allow his followers to forgo payments of the *khums* tax, while asserting the continued soteriological importance of fiscal contributions to the Imamate: giving gifts and paying the revenues of *waqf* endowments and estates. It was an intensely practical solution to the problems of the day to grant the Shi‘a a dispensation not to pay the *khums* tax, for its collection had probably become too difficult anyway. In doing so, those who had not been paying the *khums* were transformed from delinquents into full members of the community again. Although he granted this dispensation, Abū Ja‘far reasserted the logic of the revenue collection network as a whole. This network did not merely generate wealth and patronage to be redistributed, but also created a sacred economy focused upon the figure of the Imam, which maintained a sense of connection to him amongst the far-flung Imami community, even when he was thought to be in Occultation. This sacred economy justified the existence of the *wakīls* themselves, and therefore

underpinned the structures of authority which generated the office of Envoy in the first place, and which continued to provide the Envoy with a core of well-connected supporters. During the early years of perplexity, this sacred economy of allowed the faithful to feel a connection to the Hidden Imam, in much the same way as they had experienced during the lifetime of the manifest Imams who had, in any case, always been a distant and mediated presence for most of the community.

As the Envoyship became more established, it began to occupy some of the territory that had formerly been the prerogative of the Imam. In addition to issuing statements in the Imam's name, the Envoyship also mimicked the Imamate in the procedure of *naṣṣ* designation of Envoys, which closely followed the mechanism designed to guarantee the succession of Imams. However, after Abū Ja'far's assertion of the continuity of the financial network, and the succession of Ibn Rawḥ, the Envoyship lasted only a few more years until the death of the Fourth Envoy, in 328-9/940-1. Why was this? I can offer two reasons for the demise of the Envoyship. Firstly, after the Existence of a Hidden Imam had been established amongst a stable and increasingly unified core of the community, the office of Envoy was perhaps no longer so crucial. It acted as a transitional institution that asserted unity and reversed the centrifugal forces that had been tearing the community apart since the death of the Eleventh Imam. By creating a bare minimum of doctrinal consensus, and reestablishing the unity fostered by institutional centralization, the Envoyship bought the theologians and hadith scholars the time to establish a firm doctrinal foundation for the new Twelver Shi'ism.

Secondly, under Ibn Rawḥ, a crisis hit the Envoyship that critically undermined it: While Ibn Rawḥ was imprisoned by an 'Abbasid vizier, one of his associates, a man named al-

Shalmaghānī , claimed leadership of the community for himself, while openly asserting gnostic *bābī* doctrines of transmigration of divine essence into different hypostases, including himself. Ibn Rawḥ later managed to pull strings with a Shi‘ī vizier, and had Shalmaghānī executed, but the damage was done. Al-Shalmaghānī’s rise had dramatized the nightmare scenario of a non-*ahl al-bayt*, quasi-Imamic *bāb* from within the institutions of the Imamate, claiming divinely-infused authority for himself. Thereafter, the elite of the Shi‘a preferred to see authority spread between themselves, rather than concentrated in the hands of one man.

After Ibn Rawḥ, and the three-year tenure of his successor, al-Samuri, the Envoyship was dead in the water. Even though there were potential candidates for the Envoyship, they refused to step forward, or were repudiated. After the Envoys, authority in the Twelver community passed to the diffuse doctrinal authority of the scholars, and the oligarchic elite of Imamis connected to court in Baghdad. The final nail in the coffin of the Envoyship came around 342/953,⁸ with the first major work on the Occultation, Nu‘mānī’s *Ghayba*, which declared the period of mediation between the Hidden Imam and the community (which Nu‘mānī called the ‘Short Occultation’) to be finished, having been succeeded by the ‘Complete Occultation.’⁹

1.2 Literature review

In the field of early Shi‘ism, the study of doctrine and theology has preceded an interest in social and political dynamics, and so I will first review the works that concentrated on doctrine and theology, and then proceed to address the works that focus on the topic of more direct pertinence to this dissertation: those which address the *wakīl* agents and the Envoys at the

⁸ This date is given by Heinz Halm, *Shi‘ism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 42.

⁹ Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, edited by Fāris Ḥassūn Karīm (Qumm: Anwār al-Hādī 1422 [2001-2]), 178-9.

time of the Occultation, and the sociological and political context of the formation of the Occultation doctrine. The first monograph¹⁰ in English to treat the subject of the Occultation in detail was *Islamic Messianism*, published at the beginning of the 1980s by a Twelver scholar, Abdulaziz Sachedina, derived from his Toronto doctoral dissertation. This work placed traditional accounts of the Occultation under sustained scrutiny for the first time. However, Sachedina's interest is primarily on theological, doctrinal and legal developments, without close attention to political and social context.¹¹ At around the same time, another Twelver scholar, Jassim Hussain, published a version of his University of Edinburgh dissertation as *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, which addresses both doctrinal developments and political and social developments in the Shi'ī community.¹² Though Hussain's work largely accepts traditional Twelver narratives of the Occultation doctrine, it is the first account to really place the Occultation doctrine in social context, providing illuminating, if unsystematic speculations as to the institutional processes of the network of *wakīls* before and during the Occultation era.

Claiming to take a more sociological approach, Said Arjomand's Chicago dissertation and its later incarnation as a book, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam*¹³ presented a *long durée* interrogation of the development of authority in Shi'ī Islam, which was, however, primarily focused on doctrinal and theological developments, though with some important contributions to our understanding of the intersection between political and theological developments. Amir-Moezzi's *Divine Guide* focuses primarily on the Imamate before the

¹⁰ There were, of course important studies that preceded this work, notably Ernst Möller, introduction and translation of part of Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl al-dīn* as *Beiträge zur Mahdilehre des Islams* (Heidelberg: C. Winter 1901).

¹¹ See, in particular, Sachedina, *Messianism*, 78-108.

¹² Jassim Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: a Historical Background* (London: Muhammadi Trust; San Antonio: Zahra Trust, 1982).

¹³ Said Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, but provides an important theoretical contribution to the field in its highlighting the esoteric tradition of Imami Shi'ism, a tradition which contributed in important ways to the development of the Occultation doctrine, including the theology of mediation through which the Envoys were interpreted. Modarressi's *Crisis and Consolidation*,¹⁴ on the other hand, emphasized the rationalistic legacy of the Imami community. This work is ground-breaking in its erudition, and provides the foundations for much later work, both in intellectual history and in the social history. Arjomand made use of Modarressi's erudition in the 1990s with a series of articles that incorporated insights drawn from Moddarresi's work, while giving more sustained attention to the early period in which the Twelver Occultation doctrine was developed.¹⁵ However, in spite of his sociological theoretical framework, Arjomand focused largely on intellectual history, rather than closely interrogating the social and political dynamics in the early sources. Most recently, Omid Ghaemmaghani's dissertation, "Seeing the Proof" has made important progress in presenting and analyzing a hitherto scarcely touched corpus of narratives from people who claimed to have seen the Hidden Imam *after* contact with the Imam was supposed to have been broken off, as well as before.¹⁶ A work that I have not been able to consult, but which promises to be very influential in the study of the Occultation is a forthcoming monograph based upon Hassan Ansari's 2009 dissertation, "L'imamat et

¹⁴ Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1993).

¹⁵ Said Arjomand, "Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shi'ism: A Sociohistorical Perspective," *IJMES* 28, no.4, (1996): 491-515; "The Consolation of Theology. The Shi'ite Doctrine of Occultation and the Transition from Chiliasm to Law," *Journal of Religion* 76, no. 4, (1996): 548-71; "Imam Absconditus and the Beginnings of a Theology of Occultation. Imami Shi'ism around 900 CE/280-290 A.H.," *JAOS* 117, no.1, (1997): 1-12.

¹⁶ Omid Ghaemmaghani, "Seeing the Proof: The Question of Contacting the Hidden Imam in Early Twelver Shi'ite Islam," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2013).

l'Occultation selon l'imamisme,"¹⁷ which promises to provide a firmer bibliographical and text-historical foundation for the study of the sources of the Occultation doctrine.

As for the sociological and political context of the rise of the *wakīls*, and the establishment of the position of Envoy, most of the works above have given some mention to these issues. The first work in a European language to devote attention to the question of the *wakīls* was Javad Ali's 1939 article, "Die beiden ersten Safire des Zwölften Imams,"¹⁸ which largely presents the canonical Twelver view of the first two Envoys. A more critical, though highly idiosyncratic view of the Envoys during the lesser Occultation was presented by Massignon in a digression in the course of his study on the mystic Ḥallāj.¹⁹ This account of the Envoys has been somewhat overlooked, though it is still one of the best available studies of political developments in the Shi'ī community of the era. From 1972, Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr published an extensive work which provided historical context for the events of the Occultation from a Twelver perspective which became foundational for much contemporary Twelver scholarship afterwards, in two volumes: *Tārīkh al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā* and *Tārīkh al-ghayba al-kubrā*.²⁰

Jassim Hussain has given considerable momentum to the study of the nature of the *wikāla*-network and how it functioned. In *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, he brings together a broad swath of Twelver sources with some Sunni material. By extensively quoting translations from key narratives, Hussain brought the activities of the *wakīls* and the Envoys out

¹⁷ Hassan Farhang Ansari, "L'imamat et l'Occultation selon l'imamisme: Etude bibliographique et histoire des textes de hadiths" (PhD Diss., Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes-Sorbonne, Paris: 2009).

¹⁸ Javad Ali, "Die beiden ersten Safire des Zwölften Imams," *Der Islam* 2 (1939) : 197-227.

¹⁹ Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, translated by Herbert Mason (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982).

²⁰ These two volumes appear together as parts one and two of *Mawsū'at al-Imām al-Mahdi* (Qumm: *Mu'assasat Ihya' al-kutub al-islamiyya*, 2006).

of the footnotes and into direct analysis, opening the way up for further scholarship. In particular he takes an illuminating look at the fine detailed social-historical texture of the *wikāla*-network's mechanisms such as the means by which monies were secretly carried. He also begins to lay out the geographical location of *wakīls*, and makes some speculations about the structure of the *wikāla*'s hierarchy.²¹ However, he cleaves relatively closely to a traditional Twelver account of the Occultation and the nature of the *wikāla* as a divinely-inspired institution supervised by the hidden Imam, without analyzing the sources systematically, or addressing the implicit problems and questions of a corpus of sources which is teeming with rich detail and contradiction. Jassim Hussain's work on the *wakīls* was not isolated, but rather that it appears to have been part of a sustained production of an 'Edinburgh school' of Shi'ī studies, which, under the tutelage of the late I.K.A. Howard, produced a series of dissertations which gave central attention to the *wakīls*, their relations with the Imams, and their place in the institutional and political developments in the Imami community, including Shona Wardrop's dissertation on the period of the Ninth and Tenth Imams,²² and Mehmet Ali Buyukkara's dissertation on the period of the Seventh and Eighth Imams,²³ which also led to two articles regarding Seventh and Eighth Imams al-Kāzīm and al-Riḍā providing important political context for events within the Shi'ī community, and the development of the network of fiscal agents of the Imams.²⁴ Again, Modarressi's *Crisis and Consolidation* must be picked out as a key work in the development of scholarship on the *wakīls*,

²¹ See also Jasim M. Husain, (sic) "The Role of the Imamite *Wikala* with Special Reference to the First *Safir*," *Hamdard Islamicus* 5, no. 4 (December 1982): 25-52.

²² Shona Wardrop, "The Lives of the Imams, Muḥammad al-Jawād and 'Alī al-Hādī and the Development of the Shi'ite organization," (PhD Diss., University of Edinburgh, 1988).

²³ Mehmet Ali Buyukkara, "The Imami-Shi'ī Movement in the Time of Musa al-Kāzīm and 'Alī al-Riḍā" (PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1997).

²⁴ Mehmet Ali Buyukkara, "The Schism in the Party of Mūsā al-Kāzīm and the Emergence of the Wāqifa." *Arabica*, 47, Fasc. 1 (2000): 78-99; "Al-Ma'mūn's Choice of 'Alī al-Riḍā as His Heir," *Islamic Studies* 41, No. 3 (Autumn 2002): 445-46.

which manages to present, in around six condensed pages, a history of the development of the financial network which carries almost as much useful information as everything else that has preceded it.²⁵ However, this work was intended to present background to his analysis of the development of theology in the period, so inevitably it does not expand upon the theme of the financial network as a socio-political institution or the political developments of the era, often consigning important discussions to the footnotes. Liyakat Takim's work should be mentioned as providing a noteworthy intervention into the discussion of the social function of the companions of the Imams. However, it suffers from a limited acknowledgement of the great variation in status and activity of those who are listed as the Imams' followers, instead lumping them all together in the category of "men" (*rijāl*).²⁶

The real starting point for this dissertation is, as I have mentioned, the short article on the Envoys (*safīrs*) by Verena Klemm, which asked the first crucial questions that threw clear and substantial doubt on the historicity of the traditional account of the four Envoys who are believed to have lead the community during the early Occultation, thus laying the foundations for the wider critique and reconstruction of the traditional narratives that I embark upon in this dissertation.²⁷

In addition, in terms of the overall conceptualization of the structural dynamics of the Imami community, I should mention here the debate regarding the relationship between the

²⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 12-18, for the development of the financial network, and also the whole of Chapter 3 for the events leading to the Occultation.

²⁶ Liyakat Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

²⁷ Klemm, "*Sufarā'*." Verena Klemm is also responsible for an encyclopedia article which summarises work on the deputies of the Imam in the early *ghayba* period, but though this is a useful summary of scholarship, it treats the issue of the deputies as a largely theological and doctrinal question, without analysis of the de facto developments which precede these conceptual development, "Islam in Iran ix. The deputies of *Mahdi* according to Twelver Shi'ite tradition, the four intermediaries between the Hidden Imam and the faithful during his "Minor Occultation," 874-941 CE," *EIr*.

rationalist and gnostic or the so-called extremist (*ghulāt*) tendencies in Imami Shi‘ism. This debate largely derives from the largely intellectual-historical framework inhabited by most scholars of early Shi‘ism, though it is important for my topic as this relationship has important political-sociological ramifications. Marshall Hodgson, in his article “How Did the Early Shi‘a become Sectarian?”²⁸ suggested that the *ghulāt* were not beyond the pale, but in fact provided important support for the Imami Imamate, through their conceptions of the divinely-infused nature and abilities of the Imams. In recent years, scholarly debates have revolved around the poles established by Amir-Moezzi and Modarressi. While Modarressi champions the rationalist, theological strand within Imami Shi‘ism,²⁹ Amir-Moezzi argues that the true religion of the Imams was the gnostic, esoteric tendency, but that this was a secret closely guarded from the uninitiated.³⁰ Scholars like Heinz Halm³¹ Mushegh Asatryan³² and Bella Tendler³³ have provided an increasingly sharply focused picture of the distinctive vision of Islam of the community of Kufan Shi‘a amongst whom the gnostic tendencies flourished.

1.3 What is the Occultation?

While this dissertation primarily addresses the social, political and institutional articulation of ideas, rather than presenting a pure history of ideas, it will aid us to briefly outline how the complex of ideas that make up the Twelver Occultation doctrine were foreshadowed in earlier contexts. Although the Twelver Occultation was formulated in relation to a very particular

²⁸ *JAOS* 75, No. 1 (1955): 13.

²⁹ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 48-51.

³⁰ M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, translated by David Streight (New York: SUNY Press, 1994).

³¹ *Die islamische Gnosis : die extreme Schia und die ‘Alawiten*. Zürich : Artemis Verlag, 1982.

³² “Heresy and Rationalism in Early Islam: The Origins and Evolution of the Mufaḍḍal-Tradition,” PhD dissertation, (Yale, 2012).

³³ “Marriage, Birth, and Bāṭinī Ta’wīl: A Study of Nuṣayrī Initiation Based on the Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī ‘ilm al-fatāwī of Abū Sa‘īd Maymūn Al-Ṭabarānī.” *Arabica* 58, no. 1-2 (2011): 53-75.

problem – the crisis of succession following the death of the Eleventh Imam in 260/874 – the palette used to produce the Twelver Occultation was based upon pre-existing intellectual and narrative resources. Ideas do not come from nowhere; they require individuals and groups to transmit them and ensure that they reach the next generation. Stories must be repeated, books must be recopied, institutions must be upheld. If one generation fails to transmit its ideas, then they die out, to all intents and purposes, unless some enterprising cultural archaeologist turns up an old manuscript moldering in a forgotten library and reproduces it for his or her own generation. Even so, this idea might remain the preserve of a select few antiquarians or scholars who breathe the rarefied atmosphere of bygone lore. For an idea to be successfully propagated anew, it must have a particular appeal for the current generation, whether that appeal is drawn from its functional utility in meeting the problems of the day, or from another kind of significance or value.

The Occultation is an idea that had a long currency in among the Shi‘a of the central and eastern Islamic lands, and an even longer history as an archetype in the mythic traditions of the Near East. And what is Occultation? At its simplest, Occultation means absence or concealment. The Arabic verb “*ghāba ‘an*” can refer to a mundane instance of leaving the room, while in the Shi‘i context, it often meant a supernatural occurrence, involving the hand of the divine, and perhaps carrying eschatological significance.

All of the major components of the Twelver Occultation occur in earlier narrative paradigms. At its most basic, the themes of presence and absence are fundamental archetypes that are present in all religious traditions. Within the monotheistic religions of the Near East, the messianic traditions of Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity furnish rich parallels and precursors for the Twelver Occultation. While the Twelver Occultation changes in its constituent

ideas over time, we can identify a few central points that characterize the classical Occultation doctrine:

- The hidden one is an Imam, and therefore comparable to the prophets³⁴
- The Hidden Imam was a child when he went into hiding, soon after birth
- His hiding was occasioned by the danger from an oppressive ruler
- He will come again at the end of time to rule in justice, and to defeat the forces of evil, and the true believers will join him, while the non-believers will be punished
- There are two Occultations, meaning that the absence of the Imam is split into two periods. The classical conception of these two periods is that at 260/874 there began the ‘lesser’ Occultation, which was attenuated by the presence of intermediaries, known variously as the Agents (*wakīls*) Envoys (*safīrs*), Gateways (*bābs*) or Deputies (*nā’ibs*) who maintained contact with the Imam. This was followed by a ‘greater’ or ‘complete’ Occultation which persists up until the present, in which even these intermediaries are not present, and the Imam is inaccessible to the community.

When stripped down to these constituent elements, the narrative of the Hidden Imam shows clear parallels with earlier traditions. The examples of disappearances and second comings in late antique religious traditions are too numerous to mention, and they are often coupled with an ascent to heaven, as in the case of Enoch, Elijah and Jesus. The archetype of the holy child hidden due to the fear of an oppressive ruler is found in the stories of Moses, Jesus, Farīdūn and Abraham, among others. Heroes who will come again to rout the forces of evil include the Zoroastrian Saoshyant, the various Jewish Messiahs, Jesus and the Islamic Mahdī. Some of these

³⁴ In Shi‘i Islam, Imams and Prophets are often viewed as synonymous categories, under the rubric *ḥujjat allāh*, or Proof of God, see Maria Dakake, “*Ḥojjat*,” *EIr*.

earlier narratives were no doubt formative in the influence they exerted on the Twelver Occultation as it was articulated.³⁵ Some of these parallels were used explicitly as precedents that would justify the Occultation of the Imam. Thus Nu‘mānī (d.360/970-71) relies upon an number of hadiths that states that the Qā’im would follow precedents established by the prophets, in particular traditions which point to parallels between him and four earlier prophets: the fear and expectation of Moses; the same thing being said of him as said for Jesus (i.e. that he had died when he had not); the imprisonment and concealment (*ghayba*) of Joseph;³⁶ and rising with the sword like Muḥammad.³⁷ Ibn Bābūya built upon these prophetic parallels in his far larger work, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni‘ma*,³⁸ which brings together a wider range of narratives to act as justificatory precedents for the Twelver Occultation. Ibn Bābūya cited as precedents to the Twelver Occultation such disparate phenomena as the Prophet Muḥammad’s mundane hiding in a cave,³⁹ Idrīs’s hiding in a cave, being fed by an angel,⁴⁰ Abraham’s being hidden in a cave as a baby, and miraculously suckling from his own thumb,⁴¹ Dhū al-Qarnayn (the Islamic

³⁵ However, similar narratives can, of course develop with no direct influence. A striking case of a hero from a tradition which is rather far flung (though not, of course, untouched by the contexts of late antique messianism) whose death was denied, but will return in the future to fill the land with justice is King Arthur: “Yet som men say in many partys of Inglonde that Kyng Arthure ys nat dede, but had by the wyll of Oure Lorde Jesu into nother place; and men say that he shall com agayne, and he shall wyne the Holy Crosse./ Yet I woll nate say that hit shall be so; but rather I wolde sey, here in thys worlde he changed his lyff. And many men say that there ys written upon the tumbe thys [vers]: HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS [Here lies Arthur, king once, king to be].” Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, edited by Stephen Shepherd (London: Norton, 2004), 689.

³⁶ Sometimes this is just imprisonment, so presumably the idea of Joseph’s Occultation was extended from the fact of his imprisonment. The applicability of this hadith to Mūsā al-Kāzīm clearly show a wāqifite origin.

³⁷ Nu‘mānī, *Ghayba*, 329.

³⁸ Edited by ‘Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī. Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, (1395/1384 [1975]).

³⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni‘ma fī ithbāt al-ghayba*, edited by ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī, (Tehran: Intishārāt-i masjid-i muqaddas-i Jumrukān, 1384 [2006]), 48-9.

⁴⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 130. See Kevin Van Bladel’s *The Arabic Hermes: from Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), for the conflation of the figures of Idrīs, Enoch, Hermes, and their Occultations, a conflation very much associated with the early Ismailis. Van Bladel shows that the biography of Hermes, written between c840-860 by the Ismaili Abū Ma‘shar would establish the identification of Hermes and Idrīs “as common knowledge,” 165-8.

⁴¹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 138-9.

Alexander)'s journeys to the edges of the earth,⁴² and Khidr's supernatural disappearances and appearances.⁴³ Both Nu'mānī's and Ibn Bābūya's examples of precedents for the Occultation indicate a variety of kinds of disappearance and concealment which range from the mundane to the miraculous.

Crucially, for the purposes of the present dissertation, the conception of the 'lesser' Occultation presupposes the existence of intermediaries who act both as spokespersons for the Imam, and also as interpreters for the very idea of Occultation. I would argue that the existence of an intermediary must implicitly be associated with the historical phenomenon of Occultation claims.⁴⁴ This mediation has two aspects: institutional and epistemological. Thus, if an Imam is absent, he will very likely have to be seen to have appointed an institutional representative to speak in his name, both in the case of mundane and supernatural absences. Equally, if an Imam is absent, there needs to be someone present who can attest to his existence and the nature of his absence.

1.3.1 Occultation ideas in Islam

Within Islamic discourses, Occultation ideas lay down a number of important precedents which more directly foreshadow the Twelver Occultation, and also provide precedents for the ways in which the presence of the hidden Prophet or Imam was mediated to his following, both politically and epistemologically.

While there are a number of episodes in the Qur'ān that are later taken to be evidence for the Occultation, one key example of a concealment and removal is in the case of Jesus, whose

⁴² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 393-409.

⁴³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 385-393.

⁴⁴ I make an analytic contrast between historical moments when it has been claimed that someone has gone into Occultation, and the literary elaboration of such narratives, as far as it is, indeed, possible to distinguish between the two.

crucifixion was averted when God gave another man his appearance, and removed Jesus from danger, raising him up to heaven.⁴⁵ The next iterations of Occultation-like ideas in Islam are attached to the name of ‘Abd Allāh b. Saba’, who is said to have claimed that the ‘Alī did not die, but was taken up to heaven and will return again (*raj‘a*).⁴⁶

A generation later, after the death of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (d. 61/680), al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī (d. 67/687)⁴⁷ declared that another son of ‘Alī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya (d.81/700) was the Imam and Mahdī: the rightful spiritual and political leader of the Muslim community. When Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya died, it was claimed that he was taken into Occultation, either as an act of divine punishment or as an act of divine protection.⁴⁸ In addition to the idea of the Imam in Occultation, we should emphasize the role of Mukhtār as a spokesperson for the Imam, apparently in despite of the activities of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya himself. This mediatory role foreshadows the importance of *bābs*, *wakīls* and Envoys in the Imami Shi‘i context.

In addition to the clear precedents of the Mukhtār, and the Kaysāniyya group that continued his legacy, various strands of opposition to the Umayyad Caliphate employed language which resonates with Occultation ideas. Zaydī and proto-Zaydī revolts against the Umayyads used the language of “going out in revolt”, (Ar. *khurūj*) which implied a tacit secretive phase of organization and preparation beforehand. In the same tradition, the ‘Abbāsīd Ḥashimite revolution was a “going out” that was preceded by secretive underground phase of preparation and missionizing (*da‘wa*). In the Imami context this type of “going out” would be

⁴⁵ See Neal Robinson, “Jesus”, *EQ*.

⁴⁶ Sean Anthony emphasizes the difficulty of clearly discerning any historical details amidst the reports surrounding the figure of ‘Abd Allāh b. Saba’, but places these narratives within the genealogy of the Qur’ānic Jesu., “The Caliph and the Heretic Ibn Saba’: the Saba’īya and Early Shi‘ism between Myth and History” (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2009), 193-6.

⁴⁷ Gerald Hawting, “Al-Mukhtār b. Abī ‘Ubayd,” *EI2*.

⁴⁸ Sean Anthony, “Kaysāniya,” *EIr*.

identified with the “appearance” (Ar. *zuhūr*) of the Imam which would precede the final eschatological combat to rout the evildoers. This “appearance” is paired with a preceding period of concealment: Occultation (*ghayba*). A similar duality lies in the word “Upriser” (*qā'im*), which referred initially to the one who would rise up against unjust rule, but ultimately came to be conflated with the final, eschatological rise of a messianic Imam: the Mahdī.⁴⁹

Imami Shi‘ism began to fully coalesce around the Imams Bāqir (d. 117/735, 114/ 732-733, or 118/736) and Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) during the time of intensification of the pious opposition against the Umayyad dynasty, which culminated in the Ḥashimite opposition movement and the installation of the ‘Abbasid dynasty. The installation of the ‘Abbasids was initially claimed to be a fulfillment of the expectations of a member of the family of the Prophet to replace the tyranny of Umayyad rule. After the ‘Abbasid success, the Caliphs purged other rival lineages, and the followers of Bāqir and Ṣādiq and their heirs were subjected to more than a century of intermittent persecution. During this time, the importance of mediation grew in importance and the office of agent to the Imam (*wakīl*) was gradually institutionalized. The *wakīls* played a crucial role in the mediation of the authority of the Imams to their followers, many of whom continued to be in Kufa, while the Imam resided in the distant Ḥijāz. The mediation of prominent followers of the Imam may have been at the level of broadcasting the commands and opinions of the Imams, but often the Imams’ spokesmen and agents themselves took on the role of representing and interpreting the symbolic authority of the Imam to his followers. Just as Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya appears to have been, at best, ambivalent towards the activities of al-Mukhtār, clear tensions also emerge between the Imams and some of their prominent spokesmen, leading, in the

⁴⁹ See Sachedina, *Messianism*, 58-64, for the developing use of the terms Qā'im and Mahdī.

case of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, a follower of Ja‘far al-Şādiq, to explicit disassociation and cursing by the Imam.⁵⁰

Following the death of Şādiq in 148/765, there was a succession dispute over which of his sons should succeed him, which split the Imamis into several competing doctrinal factions. Two of these groups came to profess to Occultation-like beliefs. A group known to heresiographers as the *Nāwūsiyya* believed that Şādiq had not died, but went into Occultation.⁵¹ Others who had followed the elder son, Ismā‘īl who had, however, predeceased his father, transferred their allegiance to Ismā‘īl’s son, Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl, and the Qarāmiṭa claimed that he had survived and continued to await his reappearance well into the fifth/eleventh century even after the Fatimid Maḥdī had risen with the claim that he was the descendent of a series of Imams, the descendants of Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl, who had hitherto been operating in hiding.⁵²

The most important and immediate doctrinal precedents for the Twelver Occultation, however, were formulated following the death of Mūsā al-Kāẓim, who was believed by many of the Imamis to have succeeded to Ja‘far. Following the death of Kāẓim, although many transferred their allegiance to his son ‘Alī al-Riḍā, there was a significant group of Imamis who rejected the Imamate of Riḍā and claimed that Kāẓim was alive, but had gone into Occultation. This group were called the *Wāqifa*, meaning “those who stopped” at Kāẓim, without continuing to the Imamate of Riḍā. At the same time, the followers of Kāẓim had generated the idea of two absences, or Occultations, “a tenet whose origin can be traced to Musa al-Kazim's two periods of imprisonment,” by the caliphal authorities.⁵³ While later Imamis dismissed this group with

⁵⁰ Lewis, Bernard, “Abu ‘l-Khaṭṭāb Muḥammad b. Abī Zaynab Miḳlaş al-Aḍjda‘ al-Asadī,” *EI2*.

⁵¹ Al-Hasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq al-shī‘a*, edited by Helmut Ritter, (Istanbul: Maṭba‘at al-Dawla, 1931), 57.

⁵² Farhad Daftary, *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris 2005), 45-68.

⁵³ Arjomand, “Imam *Absconditus*,” 1.

accusations that the *wāqifi wakīls* only rejected the 8th Imam, Riḍā, in order to withhold the canonical taxes they had collected under Kāzīm,⁵⁴ they were, like the followers of Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl probably also responding to ideas circulating regarding the eschatological significance of the seventh Imam, which had also found voice in a hadith ascribed to Ṣādiq.⁵⁵ In spite of polemical attacks against the *wāqifa*, the Twelvers later reused and repurposed many of the hadith that had been circulated to support the *wāqifi* cause.⁵⁶ Among the many ideas that entered the Twelver Occultation doctrine by way of *wāqifi* reports was the idea that the eschatological final Imam, the Qā’im, would have two Occultations before finally returning to rule in justice.⁵⁷ This becomes important as it provides the framework for understanding the fall of the Envoys, not as a further crisis, but as an inevitable event, foretold by the Imamic prophesies.

After the *wāqifa*, at each moment of succession there were groups which argued for the Occultation of one or more Imamic figures. In addition, there was a sense in which the Tenth and Eleventh Imams, Hādī and ‘Askarī, replicated the ‘Occultation’ of Kāzīm – that is, his periods of imprisonment – for they were brought to Iraq and placed under surveillance by the caliphal authorities. This house arrest placed the Tenth and Eleventh Imams in closer proximity to many of their followers, while complicating that relationship, making direct and candid communications between Imam and followers difficult. The Nuṣayrī author, Khaṣībī, even quotes a report in which Hādī is referred to as being hidden from his followers, a state which is described as a precedent for Occultation of the Twelfth Imam.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Mehmet Ali Buyukkara, “Schism,” 86.

⁵⁵ Buyukkara, “Schism,” 99.

⁵⁶ For the *wāqifi* books on the Occultation, see Klemm “*Sufarā’*,” 135-6; and Hussain, *Occultation*, 2-9.

⁵⁷ Arjomand, “Imam *Absconditus*,” 1.

⁵⁸ Al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, *al-Hidāya al-kubrā* (Diyār ‘Aql [Lebanon]: Dār li-ajl al-ma‘rifā, 2007), 267.

1.3.2 The ‘gnostic’ contribution towards the Occultation

Though in general usage among scholars in the field, and prevalent within the primary sources, I will, as far as possible, avoid the word ‘extremists’ (*ghulāt*), as an unhelpful term for analytical purposes, as it tends to indicate more about the attitude of the person branding a wide range of beliefs and practices, rather than the content of these beliefs and practices. Instead I will point two general types of ideas which resonate in distinctive ways with the Twelver Occultation idea in the third/ninth-fourth/tenth 3rd/9th-4th/10th centuries, ideas which may broadly be described as gnostic.⁵⁹ The first of these is a family of ideas including the transmigration of souls (*tanāsukh*), the incarnation of one essence in another body (*ḥulūl*), and the transition between hypostases in a pantheon (*siyāqa*). All of these might be referred to as ‘trans-essentialism’ in that they allow for different individuals to participate in the divine or Imamic essence. The reason this cluster of ideas is important for the institutional context of the Occultation era is that it formalizes and legitimates the transition of a sacred essence from the figure of the Imam to the figure of his representatives, allowing for the generation of new interpretations of figures, canonizing people who had not previously been regarded as participating in the Imamic or divine essence: the creation of new *bābs*. These ideas tended to be associated with a disapproval of materiality, and a focus upon the inner meaning (*bāṭin*) of objects in the world (*ẓāhir*), which might belie their internal essences. The perceived disjunction between the apparent nature of the world and the true nature of reality required interpretation, and as the Imam was not accessible to everyone, interpretation must needs lie in the hands of the spokespersons of the Imams, whether

⁵⁹ The term ‘gnostic’ also has its own difficulties. For a useful study which highlights the relationship between Shi‘i Gnosticism and the term ‘*ghulāt*’, see Tamima Bayhom-Daou “The Second Century Shi‘ite Ġulāt: Were They Really Gnostic?” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 5 (2003): 13-61. For an earlier, but still useful dissection of the fluid content of the term ‘*ghulāt*’, see Wadād al-Qāḍi, “The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysaniyya,” in *Shi‘ism*, edited by Etan Kohlberg (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 169-183.

they were officially appointed, or self-appointed, or somewhere in between. These spokespersons of the Imams were given different titles according to various different cosmological schemes or institutional hierarchies, including “Gateway” *bāb*, “Annunciator” (*nāṭiq*), “Proselytiser” (*dā ṭ*), and so forth. The doctrinal conception of the disjunction between the inner meaning and the apparent exterior physical and institutional appearances of these figures might therefore allow for institutional change, as new figures could emerge as intermediaries to the Imams, in spite of earlier appearances, or indeed, in spite of Imamic disapproval. By late third/ninth century, the Eleventh Imam had several followers who claimed to represent him in this trans-essentialist mode, in particular Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, and these men and their successors played a relatively prominent part in the earliest stages of Twelver politics and doctrine. From the gnostic or trans-essentialist perspective, the absence of the Imam might be seen as just a further step in the disjunction between observable physical details (no apparent Imam) and the essential reality (an invisible, but present Imam). Such beliefs might represent a great consolation in times of crisis, as the death or imprisonment of an Imam might make little difference if the Imam’s spokesman participated in the Imam’s essence.

Another idea that resonates strongly with the Occultation idea is the distinctive cyclical history in which cycles of Prophets are believed to go through stages of manifest appearance (*ẓuhūr* or *kashf*), and concealment (*ghayba* or *satr*), often coordinated with eras of political tolerance and political oppression. This idea is well represented in Ismaili thought,⁶⁰ but also appears in Twelver Shi‘ism, in particular in the books on the *waṣiyya* which creates a continuous lineage of spiritual leadership from the beginning of the world up to the present.⁶¹ This cyclical

⁶⁰ See, for example, Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London; Boston: Kegan Paul, 1983), 186-7.

⁶¹ See [Pseudo]-Mas‘ūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya li-al-Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* (Qumm: Manshūrāt al-Riḍā, 1404 [1983 or 1984]).

understanding of prophetic-imamic history could be a source of consolation in times of crisis, as it carried within it an assumption of interplay between periods of darkness and light, oppression and tolerance, corresponding with alternate phases in which a prophet or legatee is present and visible, and phases in which they must go into hiding.

Though this influence was repudiated by many anti-agnostics and has been denied by more recent generations of Twelvers, the stamp of gnostic and *bābī* ideas are visible in early Occultation era Imamism, and before. Indeed, trans-essentialist ideas often appear alongside earlier expressions of Occultation ideas from the time of al-Mukhtār,⁶² to the Bashīriyya amongst the *wāqifa* who believed that Kāẓim was not a normal human, but made of light, and merely screened himself from human eyes when he went into Occultation,⁶³ up until the time of the Nuṣayrī who became Twelvers during the Occultation era. Amongst the Imami opposition to the Twelvers some of the followers of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, the brother of the Eleventh Imam, appear to fit within gnostic genealogy.⁶⁴ Ṭūsī lists a number of ‘heretical’ *bābs* in his *Kitāb al-ghayba*⁶⁵ which we will deal with in more detail below. In the fourth/tenth century, Shalmaghānī, the companion and assistant to Ibn Rawḥ, known to Twelver tradition as the Third Envoy, was accused and executed for full-blown claims of participating in the divine essence.⁶⁶

1.4 From *wakīls* to Envoys (*safīrs*)

The office I focus on in this dissertation is the office of Envoy (*safīr*), and the transitional forms that preceded it. In Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba* we encounter the classical theologized portrait of the ‘lesser Occultation,’ characterized by the ‘Four Envoys’ theory, which holds that the first years

⁶² Sean Anthony, “Kaysāniya,” *Elr.* .

⁶³ Buyukkara. “Schism,” 79, 96-8.

⁶⁴ See Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, Shaykh al-Ṭā’ifa, *al-Ghayba* (Najaf: Maktabat al-ādāb al-sharqiyya, 1423 [2002]), 249-257.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 8.

of the Occultation were characterized by an institution of mediation between the community and the Imam. This was the Envoyship or Safirate (Ar. *sifāra*). A series of four intermediaries or deputies known as the Envoys or ‘*Safīrs*’ transmitted the Imams statements and attested to his existence and the continuity of his guidance. In this classical theory, after the Four Envoys, the institution of the Safirate lapsed, and the community transitioned to a new era – that of the ‘greater Occultation,’ in which there was no direct mediation between the Imam and the community, though he could appear in dreams, and other ways.⁶⁷

The conception of *safīr* derives from two major paradigms. On one hand, the office of Envoy sprung directly from the actions of the fiscal agents (*wakīls*) who operated on behalf of the manifest Imams during their lifetimes, and attempted to maintain the institutions of the Imamate after the death of the Eleventh Imam. On the other hand, the understanding of the office of Envoy was influenced by the conception of the charismatic gnostic *bābs* who acted as spokesmen for the Imams, with or without the explicit sanction of the Imams. As we shall see, such *bābs* had a moment of particular influence in the years of crisis after the Eleventh Imam’s death, and even members of the proto-Twelve, pro-Occultation faction are associated with claims to being such a *bāb*.⁶⁸ Though the word *bāb* is most often to be associated with gnostic groups, it is also applied to the Envoys a couple of times in canonical Twelver sources,⁶⁹ though there is also resistance towards the usage of this word to refer to the Envoys among Twelvers, and most notably from the Nuṣayrīs.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ See Omid Ghaemmaghami “Seeing the Proof.”

⁶⁸ See, in particular, Chapters 5 and 7.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī’s use of the term, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 93; and another mention of the word in this context in a report quoted by Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:523. Both of these usages, are, however, somewhat ambiguous.

⁷⁰ See Chapter 6.

In spite of Nu‘mānī’s and Ṭūsī’s use of the word envoy (*safīr*), and later Twelver usage of the word deputy (*nā‘ib*), the earliest sources tend only to refer to the Envoys with the word agent (*wakīl*), showing us an understanding of the continuity of the Envoyship with the earlier institution of the agents of the living Imams. In some cases, the word “the Agent”, is used, giving us the sense of a singular, preeminent authority, though in these cases we can never be quite sure that there are no other *wakīls* of similar standing, thus precluding our understanding of this office as being similar to the later theologized sense of the Envoy as the Imam’s unique and preeminent representative.

The application of the word Envoy to this institution is something of a mystery. It appears first in this sense in Nu‘mānī’s *Ghayba*,⁷¹ in collocation with the word intermediaries (*wasā‘it*). However, it does not have much of a pedigree in Shi‘i lore before the Occultation, and indeed perhaps it was used precisely for this lack of baggage. In one hadith in Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*, for example, a group of people decide to take a question to ask the Prophet Muhammad directly, rather than relying upon an answer from the mouth of an envoy (*safīr*).⁷² However, we do see a usage that is perhaps more significant. Thus, Kulaynī’s *Kāfī* also carries a hadith from Ṣādiq via Hishām b. al-Ḥakam in which the prophets and messengers (*anbiyā’ wa rusul*) are referred to as God’s envoys (*sufarā’*).⁷³ This usage, then, associates the idea of Envoyship with the prophets and Imams in the hierarchy of divine guidance. This resonates with the quasi-Imamic status that was gradually taken on by the historical *wakīls* at head of the Occultation-era *wikāla*-network, but his functions also come to echo the functions of the manifest⁷⁴ Imam himself – as he is a

⁷¹ Nu‘mānī, *Ghayba*, 164; 178-9.

⁷² Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 2: 417.

⁷³ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:168.

⁷⁴ By ‘manifest’ Imams, I mean the historical Imams of the pre-*ghayba* era who were present in the world, and at least nominally in contact with their community, thereby excluding the Twelfth Imam of the *ghayba* era, whom we must treat differently – in doctrinal and theological, rather than historical terms.

figure of crucial symbolic and theological importance at the center of the network, practically directing its operation.

While acknowledging that the term ‘Envoy,’ is largely a post-Nu‘mānī term, I use it instead of simply using agent/*wakīl* to differentiate between the old guard *wakīls* of the Eleventh Imam, and the next generation of Envoys (Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī and Ibn Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī) who claimed preeminent authority rested in the hands of one man, as opposed to the ambiguous oligarchy of the early *wakīls*. This office then formed an archetype upon which were based later doctrinal elaborations that led to the canonical ‘Four Envoys theory’ of Ṭūsī. Though, for example, the term ‘*safīr*’, never appears in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, I nonetheless use the term Envoy to signal that for Ibn Bābūya, the office of Envoy did already exist.

There are two key differences between our understanding of high *wakīls* and the Envoy in its later theologically articulated, canonized form. The first is that the Envoy was a single man, whereas in the earliest phase of the Occultation seems to be evidence that the high-*wakīls* operated as a cadre, or at there is no evidence of an uncontested preeminent *wakīl*. The second key difference is that the Envoy was the only visible, direct mediator between the community and divine guidance – as represented by the Hidden Imam. Thus the Envoy’s role suggests the arrogation to himself of some of the aspects of the Imamate itself. The tendency for slippage between Imam and intermediary is one that occurs at different points in different ways in the history of Shi‘ism.⁷⁵ Another term sometimes used synonymously with Envoy is that of *bāb* – a word pregnant with significance from a comparative Shi‘i perspective, often used to denote an office invested with more of the divine presence than a mere intermediary. The conception of the

⁷⁵ See, for example, the different circumstances in the relationships between Mukhtār and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya (Sean Anthony, “Kaysāniya,” *EI*, or Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Ḳaṭṭābiyya,” *EI*) or Ḥasan-i Ṣabāḥ and the Fatimids (see Marshall Hodgson, “Ḥasan-i Ṣabāḥ,” *EI2*).

Envoy as the uniquely appointed, miraculously-gifted mediator to the Imam is one that resonates very strongly with the *bābī* ideas of gnostic and trans-essentialist Shi‘ism, suggesting that the idea of *wakīl* was transformed to Envoy, partially through dialogue with these ideas. The Nuṣayrīs, for example, were early adherents of the idea of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam. In gnostic cosmologies, the Imam’s intermediary (often known, among other titles, as *bāb*) often participates to a greater than usual extent in the divinely-connected nature of the Imam.⁷⁶ Some of this theological, supernatural character appears to some extent in the conception of the Envoy.

Before the development of the office of Envoy, proper, I employ the phrase “high-*wakīls*” to indicate the early oligarchic leadership of *wakīls*, who were operating within the early *nāḥiya*. While *wikāla*, can, in Arabic, be understood to mean both the network, and the individual office to which a functionary of the Imam was appointed, I will attempt to avoid confusion by referring to the network as the “*wikāla*-network,” while the office will be referred to by the anglicization “*wakīlate*,” which harmonizes with the commonly-accepted term Imamate. In addition, I use the word *nāḥiya*, to refer to the institutions of the Imamate without an Imam, as do the sources themselves. I distinguish between these central *wakīls*, and those who brought money into the center and transmitted blessings, boons and communications out to the community, by terming the latter ‘regional *wakīls*,’ for they were indeed attached to a specific region for whose canonical taxes they were responsible.⁷⁷ However, as we shall see, this is also not always a water-tight distinction, for it seems that the office of Envoy developed from the regional *wakīls* of a particular region: Baghdad.

⁷⁶ The structuring of the Ismaili mission also provides instructive comparisons. See also Tahera Qutbuddin’s discussion of the term *bāb al-abwāb* as compared to *dā‘ī al-du‘āt*, as ranks in the Fatimid Ismaili hierarchy, in which she argues that while *dā‘ī al-du‘āt* was the preeminent figure in the network of Ismaili missionaries, *bāb al-abwāb* is a spiritual rank within the Ismaili hierarchy of esoteric initiation, *Al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid da‘wa poetry: a case of commitment in classical Arabic literature* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 81-5.

⁷⁷ See below, Chapter 3.

I use the phrase ‘Occultation faction’ to denote the politico-theological movement that proposed and articulated the Occultation idea as the solution to the crisis of succession, this faction helps us refine our understanding of the early Occultation era, in contrast with Twelver or proto-Twelver, not all of whom were necessarily initially adherents of the Occultation-idea, and also on the understanding that not all of those who might have participated in an alliance of interests to support the Occultation idea in the earliest period were ultimately included in the Twelver community – most notably the Nuṣayrīs. I also use such phrases as ‘pro-‘Amrī’ to distinguish between doctrinal position and political affiliation.

1.5 Periodization

Unless speaking about the post-Nu‘mānī doctrinal conception of the Occultation, I have avoided the traditional periodization of the “lesser Occultation” (260/874 to 328-9/940-1) and the “greater Occultation” (328/940-1 to the present). This periodization into two eras stems from the assumption of the doctrine of two distinctly differentiated periods, the first of which, the “lesser Occultation” was characterized by structures of mediation between the Imam and the community, in the form of the succession of four officially appointed intermediaries – the four Envoys, while the second period is understood to have been without such mediation. Although scholars have for some time been open to the idea that these two eras were a later theological construction,⁷⁸ the implications of this insight have not yet been followed through to the logical conclusion of removing the two Occultations as an active principle of historical periodization.⁷⁹ However, the real moment of distinction should be when it was agreed that no further candidate

⁷⁸ See, for example, Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 81-6.

⁷⁹ Thus, Arjomand, for example proposed a chronological progression based on theological developments, moving from chiliastic hopes to the development of hierocratic authority during the era of the Envoys, dominated by the Nawbakhti family. However, he retained the date 941CE as a cut-off point, with no real justification from the earliest sources. In addition, his focus on theology removes emphasis from the crucial developments in the establishment of *de facto* power over the *wikāla*-network. Arjomand, “Crisis,” 491-515.

for Envoyship would be acceptable. As we will see in Chapter 8, there were various claimants to the Envoyship after the death of al-Samurī. With Nu‘mānī’s proclamation of the end of the Envoyship and the era of the greater Occultation, we can begin to feel confident that a new era has, indeed, begun, but it remains unclear exactly when the consensus was made that no further Envoy would be forthcoming. Instead we must be satisfied with the assumption that it happened sometime after the death of al-Samurī in 328-9/940-1 and Nu‘mānī’s interpretation of the two Occultations in his *Ghayba* written in 342/953. Even so, we cannot be sure that Nu‘mānī’s interpretation was immediately considered as definitive. The example of Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī’s prototype of two eras of mediation during the Occultation described in his *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, written in 290/903, shows us clearly how a conception of the Occultation could be influential, but not definitive, and Nu‘mānī’s conception might have been equally unstable when first proposed. Nonetheless, the date of composition of Nu‘mānī’s *Ghayba* is the clearest date we can use to pin down the new era in which the Hidden Imam was understood to be operating unseen and without intermediaries. Thus, we must distinguish between the doctrinal periodization, which places the start of the ‘greater Occultation’ upon the death of al-Samurī in 328-9/940-1, and a political periodization which places the beginning of the era of a new kind of authority around the time of Nu‘mānī’s *Ghayba*, a decade later.

In writing a history of social and political developments, then, I will use the neutral phrases ‘pre-Occultation era’, ‘early Occultation era’, and the ‘classical Twelver era,’ each of which eras can be broken down into smaller periods (see table below). The pre-Occultation is the era of the living, manifest Imams. The early Occultation era is a period of flux and contestation – both institutional and theoretical, and indeed developments in institutions and theory are closely interrelated. The classical era emerges gradually from the early Occultation era, and its limits are

ill-defined, starting with the synthesizing work of Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991-2), and culminating in the work of al-Ṭūsī (d.460/1067).

Table 1: A new periodization for the Occultation-era Imami community

Pre-Occultation	Until 260/874: Era of the manifest Imams acting as ultimate legal and doctrinal authorities and actively directing the <i>wikāla</i> -network
Early Occultation	260-c280/874-c893: The period of the early <i>nāḥiya</i> , when authority was in the hands of the surviving old guard <i>wakīls</i> appointed by the Eleventh Imam. They aimed to maintain the institutions of the Imamate in the face of widespread doubt, fluidity and contestation in the political and doctrinal affairs of the Imami community. This was the first and most intense phase of the Era of Perplexity (<i>ḥayra</i>).
	c280-c290: The rupture or <i>interregnum</i> between the surviving old guard of <i>wakīls</i> and the new generation of Envoys.
	290-329/ 903-941: The period of the Envoys. They attempted to reestablish and consolidate the centralized <i>wikāla</i> -network, by establishing quasi-Imamic authority in their own hands, but ultimately failed.
	329-342/ 941-953: The canonical Envoys lapse, but a period of contestation continues in which pretenders continue to make claims to be Envoys.
Classical era	338-460/950-1067: Nu‘mānī declares the end of the Envoyship, and the infidelity of anyone who claims to be an Envoy henceforth. The authority of the Envoys is replaced by the diffuse epistemic authority of the scholars. This is followed by a period of consolidation of doctrine and theology, composition of texts that will become canonical, stabilization of epistemic

	orthodoxy based around hadith transmitters and jurists, rather than political actors at the head of the <i>wikāla</i> -network
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Note also, that in addition to breaking down the clarity of the boundary between the lesser and greater Occultation eras, this re-periodization also complicates the period of the Envoys, distinguishing between the earliest period in which the *wakīls* of the Eleventh Imam continue to maintain the institutions of the Imamate, and the period in which the Envoyship is reconstrued as an independent authority.

1.6 Sources and methods

1.6.1 A chronology of sources

Central to my method in this dissertation is the attempt to prioritize sources that are early over those that are late. The dominant approach in scholarship hitherto has been, by default, to read earlier sources through the lens of Ṭūsī’s canonical narrative of the Four Envoys, an approach that conveniently cuts through much of the confusion and contradiction of the earliest layers of reports, but does not improve our understanding of the early Occultation era. Instead I rely in the first place upon the more confused testimony of the earlier authorities, in particular Kulaynī, Khaṣībī, Kashshī and Ibn Bābūya, before turning to Ṭūsī and others.

I will now present a chronology of those sources which are most pertinent to understanding the Envoys. These can be understood to come in three waves in which authors sought to make sense of the meaning of early Occultation era events in different ways. The first wave (1-3) develops a heresiographical understanding which sought to order and make sense of the plethora of doctrinal speculation generated during the years of crisis. These sources tend to focus on abstract reasoning with few detailed narratives from which historical details might be gleaned. The second wave (4-7) is formed of hadith compilations which preserve the reports

about the *wakīls* and Envoys, and other key community figures, while presenting a gradually crystallizing theology of Occultation. The third wave is formed by the sources that are formed under the influence of the canonical status of the Four Envoys (8-10).

1. Al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī's *Kitāb firaq al-shī'a*, written in 286/899.⁸⁰
2. Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī's⁸¹ *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, written around 290/903,⁸² the last part of which is quoted in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni'ma*.
3. Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qummī's *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa al-firaq*,⁸³ written sometime between 286/899 and 292/905.⁸⁴
4. Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī's *Kitāb al-kāfi*,⁸⁵ completed before his death in 328 or 329/939-40 or 940-41.⁸⁶
5. Al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī's⁸⁷ *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, written before his death around 358/969,⁸⁸ though with some sections probably completed before.
6. Muḥammad ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nu'mānī (d.360/970-71) completed his *Kitāb al-ghayba*, in 342/953.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ See Madelung, "Some Remarks on the Imāmī *Firaq* Literature," in *Shi'ism*, edited by Etan Kohlberg (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003): 154.

⁸¹ See Madelung, "Abū Sahl Nawbakhtī," *EIr*.

⁸² Klemm suggests that it was written between 290/903 and 300/913, "*Sufarā'*," 147. However, the later date is unlikely, because the text states that the Imam has been hidden "for 30 years or thereabouts". Modarressi also notes that the text was finished around 290/903, *Crisis*, 88.

⁸³ Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Qummī, *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa al-firaq*, edited by Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr (Tehran: Mu'assasa-i maṭbū'āt-i 'aṭā'i, [1963]).

⁸⁴ Madelung, "Imāmī *Firaq*," 154.

⁸⁵ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kulaynī, *Al-Uṣūl min al-kāfi*, edited by 'Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī, (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiya, 1388 [1968]).

⁸⁶ See Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Hassan Ansari, "Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (m. 328 ou 329/939-40 ou 940-41) et son *Kitāb al-kāfi*: une introduction," *Studia Islamica* 38 (2009): 191-247.

⁸⁷ For the vocalization of this name, see Yaron Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī- 'Alawīs: an Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 17, n47.

⁸⁸ For the dating of his death, see Yaron Friedman, *Nuṣayrī- 'Alawīs*, 33.

⁸⁹ Halm, *Shi'ism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 42.

7. Abū ‘Amr Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar al-Kashshī’s *Ma‘rifat al-rijāl*, or simply *Rijāl*, extant in the redaction of Ṭūsī, known as *Ikhtiyār ma‘rifat al-rijāl*,⁹⁰ written before his death in the mid-fourth/tenth century,⁹¹ though largely reflecting an understanding of the Shi‘ī community before the canonization of the Envoys.
8. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Ibn Bābūya al-Qummī (known as “The Truth-telling Shaykh,” al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-ni‘ma*, written between 368/978-9 and his death in 381/991-2,⁹² the first work that establishes the canonical sequence of Four Envoys, though without using this language.
9. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d.460/1067), his *Kitāb al-ghayba*, written around 448/1056-57,⁹³ the decisive work in canonizing the doctrine of the Four Envoys.
10. Ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī the Younger’s *Dala‘il al-imāma*. The author died sometime in the Fifth/Eleventh century, though the composition of the work is more complicated.⁹⁴ This work does not correspond to classical Four Envoys theory.

I have also used a number of legal works for Chapter 2, in particular Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*, again, and Ibn Bābūya’s *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*.⁹⁵

Having laid out the overall chronology of the key sources I use in this dissertation, I will make a few more detailed remarks about particular works. Our earliest source that preserves a

⁹⁰ Abū ‘Amr Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Kashshī, *Rijāl al-Kashshī [Ikhtiyār ma‘rifat al-rijāl]* (Beirut: Mu‘assisat al-A‘lamī li-al-matbu‘āt, 1430/2009).

⁹¹ Halm places his death around 340/951, *Shi‘ism*, 41.

⁹² Ghaemmaghami cites Serdani as setting 368/978-9 as the *terminus post quem* of the composition of *Kamāl al-dīn*. “Seeing the Proof,” 145, n373.

⁹³ Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: the Idea of Mahdī in Twelver Shi‘ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 38.

⁹⁴ See Hassan Ansari’s discussion of Ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī, “*Nuskha-yi kitāb al-fāziḥ ibn Rustum*,” Chapter 76, in *Barrisīhāyi tārikhī dar ḥawza-yi islām wa taṣayyu‘: majmū‘a-yi navad maqāla va yāddāsht*, (Tehran: Markaz-i asnād-i majlis-i shūrā-yi Islāmī, 2012).

⁹⁵ *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, edited by ‘Alī Akbar Ghaffārī (Qumm: Jamā‘at al-mudarrisīn fī al-ḥawza al-‘ilmiyya fī qumm al-muqaddisa, 1392 AH [1972-3]).

large number of reports about the early Occultation era is Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*. For Kulaynī, there was no urgent theological imperative to preserve information regarding the Envoys or the *wikāla*-network, for in Kulaynī’s time, the doctrine of the Four Envoys and the two Occultations defined by this office, had not yet gained the status of orthodoxy.⁹⁶ Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl* begins the process of theologization of the role of Envoy that clouds our picture of the historical circumstances, but it still is our central source for the early Occultation *wikāla*-network, for the reason that narratives about the Envoys had come to be doctrinally important by the time of Ibn Bābūya, following Nu‘mānī’s declaration that the Lesser Occultation had been defined by the mediation of the Envoys, and therefore, a more significant volume of information about the Envoys is preserved.

Al-Hidāya al-kubrā, compiled by al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣṣībī,⁹⁷ is not a fully canonical Twelver book, though many Twelvers used it for its stories of the Imams.⁹⁸ Instead its author was a Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī tradition, and the work contains many small but significant indications of the milieu in which it was produced, though it is sometimes described as having been produced “under *taqiyya*.”⁹⁹ The Nuṣayrīs have been identified as the only surviving example of the third/ninth-fourth/tenth century *ghulāt* groups.¹⁰⁰ Crucially, they were participants in the Imami community, and were, and still are, adherents of the Occultation idea,

⁹⁶ See Ghaemmaghami’s comprehensive discussion of the gradual appearance of the idea of Occultation. “Seeing the Proof,” 34-54. Ghaemmaghami notes the paucity of evidence for the idea of the Occultation in the early part of the 4th/10th century. He confirms that Kulaynī’s *Kāfī* is the earliest surviving work which includes substantial information on the Occultation. 59

⁹⁷ For the vocalization of this name, see Yaron Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs: an introduction to the religion, history, and identity of the leading minority in Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 17, n47.

⁹⁸ By the time of Majlisī’s vast, and somewhat indiscriminate mission to collect Imami hadith, he does refer to the *Hidāya* as one of the books “around which the millstones of the Shī‘a turn,” though he admits that some saw it as unreliable. Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 26.

⁹⁹ Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 34.

¹⁰⁰ Halm, “Ḡolāt,” *Elr*.

and the line of twelve Imams, thus allowing us to categorize them as ‘twelvers’, though they may not now be seen as part of the ‘Twelver’ sect with a capital ‘T’. In the early period, however, such lines were probably more fluid, and, at the very least, we must accept that the early Nuṣayrīs and proto-Nuṣayrīs were active players in the discourse that formed the early Occultation-faction, giving their support to adherents of the Occultation idea as a solution to the succession of the Eleventh Imam. This brings us to the knotty question of where to position the Nuṣayrīs with regard to the Imami community – were they insiders, or beyond the pale? This is a topic that bears a great deal more investigation, but for the purpose of this dissertation it will suffice us to note that the Nuṣayrī texts provide us with a parallel tradition that has preserved as a source is precisely in its common origins with the Twelver sources, combined with its important information about the early Occultation-period, similar in its typology to the reports of the Twelvers, but providing us with some important extra details. The particular value of the *Hidāya* is its divergent assumptions about the nature of Imamate and Occultation, which do, of course, still result in distortions of the historical narratives, but they are distortions of a subtly different character to those of the canonical Twelver sources. Some information from the Nuṣayrī sources can be integrated with little comment – in cases where it appears to merely furnish extra information, rather than changing the overall tone of the Twelver sources. Other information, has added relevance in altering our understanding of the Imami community of the time. Even the close harmony between some of the Twelver accounts and the Nuṣayrī accounts raises interesting questions that have been insufficiently acknowledged. The confluence of Twelver and Nuṣayrī accounts show us how the restrictive vision of an anachronistically early and stable Twelver identity, to the exclusion of other strands of thought, undermines the richness of detail that emerges from an understanding of more porous boundaries in this period of flux. The

participation of Nuṣayrī strands of the community must be acknowledged from the outset, and, despite the official ostracism of Ibn Nuṣayr, we must see the Nuṣayrīs as participating in the formulation of the Occultation doctrine, and perhaps other doctrines that furnish part of later Twelver orthodoxy. After Kulaynī, Khaṣībī's *Hidāya* adds a few narrative reports about the activities Abū Ja'far. It gives far less attention to Abū Ja'far than to 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd, who appears as a problem that needs to be solved, due to the fact that his status as *wakīl* of the Eleventh Imam interfered with their perception of Ibn Nuṣayr as being the Eleventh Imam's *bāb*.¹⁰¹ Abū Ja'far is merely mentioned as part of the pantheon of Envoys,¹⁰² suggesting that the succession of Envoys has been established by the time of Khaṣībī. Unfortunately, we cannot precisely date Khaṣībī's text. Friedman gives his death date as 358/969,¹⁰³ placing it before Ibn Bābūya wrote *Kamāl al-dīn*. This makes the *Hidāya* the earliest source in which the Four Envoy theory appears and significant, then, the earliest source in which Abū Ja'far al-'Amrī's activities as Envoy are depicted. Neither Kulaynī nor Nu'manī present a developed sense of the Envoys, nor list the Envoys as being four in number. It is, then, a remarkable fact that has not yet been noted that the earliest fully developed depictions of the Four Envoys come in a Nuṣayrī text, and this perhaps gives us further circumstantial evidence of the importance of the gnostic contribution to the development of the Occultation idea. As we will see in Chapter 6, the distinctive contribution of the Nuṣayrī perspective is reports which oppose the inflation of 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd's status to *bāb*-hood, allowing us to posit the existence of others who did indeed impute *bāb*-hood to him.

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 6.

¹⁰² Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 392.

¹⁰³ Friedman, *Nuṣayrī- 'Alawīs*, 33.

However, the apparently early dating of the *Hidāya* is complicated by the fact that different sections of the work may well have been compiled at different stages, including, quite possibly, after Khaṣībī's death. Thus, there is a section on the lives of the Imams, a section on the lives of the *bābs*, and a final section on the 'Four *Wakīls*' which was very probably added after the other sections, given that neither the section on the Imams nor the section on the *bābs* demonstrates an awareness of the Four Envoys theory. For example, the status of Abū Ja'far is not at all elevated in the *Hidāya*'s section on the lives of the Imams. This part of the *Hidāya* is the only among our sources to include testimony from the brother of Abū Ja'far, who was named Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān al-'Amrī. The chains of transmission indicate that Khaṣībī had directly communicated with him. Though we might expect the testimony of Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān al-'Amrī to be particularly favorable to his brother, in fact, none of the reports transmitted from him gives any sense of Abū Ja'far having been directly involved in the miraculous activities of the *nāḥiya*. Instead, in one, Abū Ja'far is a mere eyewitness to the miraculous activities of the *nāḥiya*.¹⁰⁴ From an insider 'Amrī perspective, then, this earliest attestation to Abū Ja'far appears to give him a privileged place as a reporter regarding activities of the Occultation-era *nāḥiya*, but does not seem to impute to him the canonized status of Envoy. Given that these quotations from Aḥmad al-'Amrī appear in the chapter on the Twelfth Imam, not the final chapter on the *wakīls*, it is very likely that the chapter on the *wakīls* may have been a slightly later addition once the canonical nature of the Envoys had been established. The testimony of the *Hidāya*, then appears to give us two layers of evidence about the 'Amrīs: the earlier chapters on the Imams and the *bābs* which include reports from the brother of Abū Ja'far, and probably represent early-mid

¹⁰⁴ In this, Abū Ja'far reports that "a man from the people of the *sawād* carried much money to the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) (AS) and it was returned to him..." Abū Ja'far may or may not have been directly involved in this transaction, but all we can infer from this that he was a privileged eyewitness. Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 279.

fourth/tenth century conception of the Nuṣayrī pantheon (much of which, of course, would have been generated much earlier); and the final section on the *wakīls* which was probably appended to the section on the *bābs* following the conception of the lesser and the greater Occultation sometime after 329/941, and possibly, for all we know, even after Khaṣībī's death in 358/969.

Another work that seems to provide a divergent context for the understanding of the Twelver community is Ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī's *Dalā'il al-imāma*. Though the *Dalā'il* is later than most of the sources I rely on, and does not otherwise give one a sense of great historical reliability, it seems to preserve many features that do not conform to Ṭūsī's canonization of the Four Envoy's theory, some of which may, like Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*, have been generated within a fourth/tenth century gnostic or *ghulāt* milieu. We will look at the testimony of the *Dalā'il* in more detail in the relevant places below, but for the moment I will note that it preserves a *bābī* sentiment comparable to that displayed in the *Hidāya*, which requires that alongside the name and basic information about Imam, the name of his *bāb* must also be mentioned, many of these *bābs*, though not all, corresponding to the pantheon mentioned in the *Hidāya*.

1.6.2 Methods of approaching sources

The sources for the earliest phase of the Occultation era are difficult to use, and anyone attempting to use these sources to reconstruct a historical narrative must constantly plot a dangerous course between excessive credulity and dismissive skepticism. It is perhaps the case with most truly significant moments of historical genesis, that the embryonic phases go undocumented, perhaps they are undocumentable, due to the fast and fluid developments that occur before the actors involved even know what is in the process of becoming. Certainly this is so for the development of the Occultation doctrine and its corresponding institutions. The earliest phase of the Occultation era is something of a black box. The events of the Crisis of Succession

following the death of the Eleventh Imam are like a discursive ‘big bang’ which sent out a chaotic panoply of different narrative interpretations which combine with each other, contradict each other, and which had already undergone significant mutations and elaborations by the time they are preserved in the works of Kulaynī, Ibn Bābūya and Ṭūsī in the following centuries, after which they then steadily continued to transform, but at a more gradual pace from the period of classical canonization of doctrine to the present day. Nonetheless, by comparing reports that refer to the initial key events and attempting to reconstruct chronologies and to understand the distorting effects of theological and political reinterpretation of these events, we can approach an understanding of the original milieu which produced these reports, and we can identify some of the basic facts that came to loom large as items of contestation and elaboration in the developing universe of early Twelver Shi‘ism.

The basic unit we have to deal with in doing this work is the hadith report (often called the *khbar* (pl. *akhbār*) in the Shi‘i tradition. A hadith report is a quotation or citation of a statement of a religiously important figure or a narrative regarding his or her actions that has been preserved due to its religious value. In the Sunni context, the most highly-prized hadith are those that go back to the Prophet Muhammad, though hadith exist that report the statements of God (*ḥadīth qudsī*), and prominent early jurists. In the Shi‘i context, hadith of the Prophet stand alongside statements and narratives of the Imams, as being of equal religious value. The scientific study of Shi‘i hadith has barely been broached.¹⁰⁵ While much ink has been spilled

¹⁰⁵ Newman gives an assessment of the state of the study of Shi‘i hadith in *Formative Period*, xiii-xvix. There has been important work since Newman wrote this. Particularly to be noted for their contribution to the methodology of approaching Shi‘i Hadith are Gleave’s work on the juristic use and formulation of hadith corpora, see, for example, “Between *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh*: The “Canonical” Imāmī Collections of Akhbār,” *Islamic Law and Society* 8, No. 3, (2001): 350-382; and Najam Haider’s work on Zaydi legal traditions, *Origins*.

regarding Prophetic hadith in the Sunni canon, and the question of authenticity in general¹⁰⁶ as well as historical hadith in the historical chronicles,¹⁰⁷ the dynamics of the compilation and use of hadith in Shi‘i scholarship will require generations of careful studies to allow us to more fully understand Shi‘i hadith. What is certain is that the treatment of Shi‘i hadith must be guided by substantially different rules from both the treatment of Sunni prophetic hadith and historical reports. The statements of the Imams are very comparable to the statements of the Prophet Muhammad in their religious value for the Imamis, however, the hadith of the Imams continue to be produced for another couple of centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, until the death of the Eleventh Imam in 260/874. This radically changes the dynamics of the corpus, for the majority of the Shi‘i corpus produced from the time of Bāqir and Ṣādiq onwards was thus produced at a time of greater urbanism, literacy and increasingly energetic book production. The hadith that report the central events of this dissertation were compiled by a class of literate scholars who had been actively participating in the scholarly enterprise of hadith preservation throughout this period, meaning that these hadith were generated and reproduced in a particular milieu whose dynamics dictated the nature of the corpus. The earliest hadith compilations that deal with the events of the earliest phase of the Occultation era appear to have been written down just a couple of decades after the events in question.¹⁰⁸ The extent to which basic narratives could be altered once established was, in this case, limited by living memory and by the

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Jonathan Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); Harald Motzki, ed., (*Ḥadīth: Origins and Developments*. Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ See, in particular, Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: a Source-Critical Study* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994); and for the narratological development of Arabic historical writing see Stefan Leder, *Story-telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ See my discussion of ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, in Chapter 6.

conservative methodology of the (largely Qummī) hadith transmitters, who may have been willing to believe the miraculous accounts of the early Occultation era, but were less willing to radically alter them once they had been established. This relatively conservative attitude to the preservation of previously-generated narratives can be seen in the need to make redactions and mosaic compilations of hadith¹⁰⁹ in order to put across a doctrinal point, rather than the generation of entirely new narratives to meet the changing requirements of the community over the course of the early Occultation period.¹¹⁰

Hadith reports are typically equipped with an *isnād*, a chain of transmitters, which preserves information about who transmitted each hadith report going back to its purported eyewitness. I have paid close attention to the *isnāds* of the hadith I work with, both as evidence of the epistemological community of hadith transmitters, but also for the ways in which these transmitters were connected to one another, and to the protagonists of the events they relate. This approach, then, situates each transmitter of a hadith within a complex network that is both epistemological and political.

Hadith reports are preserved because they contain some piece of information of religious value. Many of the reports I discuss have been preserved for their value as evidence for the existence of the Hidden Imam, the truth of the Occultation doctrine, and the legitimacy of the Four Envoys, or some transitional idea which later came to be bundled with those doctrines. Thus the very factors that led to their preservation are also factors which lead to their distortion, for as time went on and the doctrines of the Occultation crystallized, the hadith which supply the

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, my discussion of the ‘*thiqa* hadith’, in Chapter 6.

¹¹⁰ Ibn Bābūya, for example, preferred to quote from earlier theologians, such as Ibn Qiba and Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī, rather than generate innovative doctrinal syntheses himself, thereby treating even theological disputation in the conservative manner of the hadith scholar. See his introduction to *Kamāl*, 1-126.

evidence are increasingly expected to conform to the doctrines they have been preserved to prove. This problem, however, also provides a key to its solution, in that we can often discern a progressive process of distortion which allows us to reconstruct a chronology in the development of the literature, even before the hadiths are preserved in book form. The surviving texts that we can positively date provide a skeleton, and allow us to see the gradual crystallization of doctrinal orthodoxy. The idea of the Occultation of the Child Imam was established early, before any of our extant sources had been written, presumably occurring to some of the Shi‘a only shortly after the death of the Eleventh Imam,¹¹¹ while the idea of the Four Envoys, on the other hand, was established far later, making its first appearance with Khaṣībī and Ibn Bābūya in the mid-late fourth/tenth century. Given these basic outlines, we can begin to construct a probable timeline for the formation of individual reports which appear in these works, based upon the degree to which they conform to the gradually crystallizing orthodoxy. This is complicated by the fact that there are always different factions among the Imamīs and the Twelvers who seek to contest what kind of beliefs, practices and doctrines become established in their community. Some works may preserve earlier kinds of orthodoxy or omit to mention recent developments.

In order to deal with the political, factional context of hadith generation, I have paid detailed attention to the *isnāds* of the reports which contain information about the Envoys, to understand the political context in which particular reports gained currency. It is perhaps not surprising to see that particular groups of men are overwhelmingly associated with the transmission of particular kinds of reports. For the earliest phase of the Occultation in which hadith transmitters, Qummī hadith transmitters like ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī were

¹¹¹ Several reports converge upon the idea of “a year or two” after the death of al-‘Askarī as being the moment when the Hidden Imam was proven to them. See Chapters 4-6.

instrumental in coming to Samarra and Baghdad, and bringing reports of events in those cities back to their community, to be preserved for posterity. In the following phase in which the authority of the Envoy Abū Ja‘far was being established after his death in 305/917, the men who provided evidence about the Envoy tended to be his close associates. This follows the path by which unity was gradually reestablished at the center, as the Imami elite were eventually won over to the Twelver cause to form a clique.

In this approach, I have benefitted from the example set by the work of Najam Haider who uses the *isnād* not only as an epistemological instrument, but also as an indicator of group identity between the transmitters, and a way of tracking the crystallization sectarian affiliation during the first few centuries of Islam.¹¹² It is true that Haider was working on legal rulings, and in the realm of historical narrative and biographical hadiths which furnish much of the meat of the current workpeople may, of course, transmit stories about their friends as well as their enemies. However, in these cases we are usually able to glean information about antagonistic political affiliations from the context, tone, and rhetorical structuring of these reports. In addition, we are able to mine the sources for clues about the structural make-up of the community and its actors, by enquiring into features such as geography, finance, and the mechanisms and technologies of communication and transportation.

Nevertheless, this is tricky work, and, in what follows I have tried to be clear about the cases in which I feel fairly sure that I have uncovered what might be considered as historical fact, and those cases which I have resorted to speculation to fill in a probable development.

¹¹² Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shī‘a: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 42-6.

1.7 Sociological framework

In approaching the context in which the Occultation doctrine was articulated, I have started from the assumption that doctrine must be produced through the social and political dynamics of actors embedded in a particular society. The framework I have employed to think about this society is drawn from various sources. Weber's conception of charisma has its shortcomings, but must still be engaged with, not least because it is explicit or implicit in much that is written about the Imams. Weber's ideal types of traditional, bureaucratic, and charismatic authority continue to be useful tools when thinking about historical processes, and the relationship between social and political structures and historical change. Weber's conception of charisma benefits from the addition of a more sustained reflection on the process of mediation and representation. When we acknowledge the process of mediating and representing the charisma of the Imam, we must also acknowledge an epistemological dimension which was deemed highly important by Shi'i Muslims from an early period.¹¹³ In order to think about the process of representing the Imam's authority to the community which recognized his charisma, I have had been influenced by Durkheim's conception of the sacred as a means of binding a distinct community together, as laid out in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.¹¹⁴ However, the distinctive context of the Shi'i community at the turn of the fourth/tenth century is very different from either of the contexts that Durkheim was most preoccupied with (Australian aboriginal religion and European modernity of the nineteenth century). Thus, it will benefit us to take a little time to describe the distinctive dynamics of this community in this period.

¹¹³ See Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 367, for a question regarding the epistemological problem caused by the fabrication of hadith reports and the subsequent misrepresentation of the nature of the Imam's authority.

¹¹⁴ Durkheim, Émile, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995).

For the Shi‘a, the Imam, in spite of whatever may have been the actual conditions of his effective authority, exerted a symbolic authority that tied his followers to him and to each other. The effective media through which this symbolic authority was transmitted were firstly the physical objects collected and redistributed in the ‘sacred economy’ generated through the *wikāla* network’s legitimate collection and distribution of canonical taxes, and its other ancillary phenomena. Secondly, and sometimes distributed as part of this sacred economy, were the edicts issued by the Imam himself: the rescripts (*tawqī‘āt*). Thirdly, there were the reported activities and utterances of the Imams: the hadith reports or *akhbār*. On one hand, the sacred economy was maintained by the fiscal agents of the *wikāla* network and on the other hands the epistemic artifacts from the Imams were transmitted by elite followers of the Imams and preserved by the hadith-transmitters and compilers, thereby transmitting to the community the symbolic authority of the incumbent Imam, while also preserving and reproducing the symbolism of earlier Imams.

As we shall see, the epistemic function of reproducing the reports of the Imams, and the institutional bureaucratic function of the *wakīl* agents was, on one level, equivalent, in that both were shoring up the authority of the incumbent Imam, and representing him to the community. However, the fiscal agents and the hadith transmitters increasingly came into tension with one another. The prerogative of the *wakīl* agents was to perpetuate the centralized authority of the fiscal-sacral *wikāla* network that imposed a kind of effective authority in the present. In contrast, the epistemic authority of the hadith-transmitters and compilers, and the scholarly class as a whole, was based more upon the reproduction of an image of the symbolic authority of the Imam transmitted from the past, rather than exerting the effective authority in the Imam’s name in the present. These tensions came to the fore, in particular in the Occultation era, when the absence of

the Imam spurred a renegotiation of how authority would be regulated and perpetuated in a very different kind of Imami community.

Throughout this dissertation, I apply the word ‘institution’ to the structures which surround the Imam, do the work of the Imamate and represent the Imam to his community. It should however, that while these are institutions in the sense that they continue to function, to some extent, independently of the bearer of the office, and generate expectations for continuity after the death of the individual who was carrying them out, they are, nonetheless highly informal,¹¹⁵ relying to a large extent upon kinship, patronage and direct relationship. Nonetheless, the institution of the *wikāla* network of fiscal agents was sufficiently robust to perpetuate itself even when the central principle around which it was organized, the Imam, was no longer present.

1.7.1 Symbolic and effective authority

In seeking to understand the structural dynamics of the Shi‘i community before and after the Occultation, we have to come to grips with a number of difficult conceptual questions which have long dogged the study of early Shi‘ism. What was the relation between the Imams and their followers? How was it possible that the Shi‘i community could contain such diverse beliefs if they followed the guidance of the same Imam? What were the mechanisms by which Imamic authority was projected out into the community? Who were the men who represented the Imam to his community, and how were they appointed? How formal or informal were the institutions of Imamate within which the Imam’s appointees operated?

¹¹⁵ For a sociological definition of ‘institutions’ see, for example Shmuel Eisenstadt, “Social Institutions,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by David Sills (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

To understand the nature of Imamic authority, we must understand that an Imam was a number of things at the same time. He was a political figure, choosing to take or refrain from political action within his community and beyond. He was a source of legal and doctrinal thought, issuing statements to his followers on subjects of concern to them. Crucially, the Imam was also a symbol. In this symbolic dimension, there was a more or less arbitrary relationship between his own nature, and the meanings he stood for among different hermeneutic communities that acknowledged his Imamate.¹¹⁶

Understanding the Imam as symbol provides an answer to the vexing question of the relationship between various branches of the Imami Shi‘i community. It is something of a conundrum how the Imams from Ja‘far al-Šādiq until al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī could have presided over a community that claimed to follow him as the spokesman of divine truth, and yet had such radically divergent views regarding issues such as anthropomorphism, reincarnation, and the nature of the Imamate itself.¹¹⁷ However, if we understand the community as bound by recognition of the *symbolic* authority of the Imam, this divergence begins to make sense. While a number of diverse groups recognized the symbol, they understood the nature of the symbolism differently, according to the different hermeneutic traditions to which they belonged.

The Imam’s ability to limit the hermeneutic variety in interpreting his symbolic dimension was limited by the fact that he had few coercive mechanisms in his repertoire to enforce community boundaries. The main mechanisms he could resort to were excommunication

¹¹⁶ To return to Durkheim, a sacred symbol is infused with its sacredness through communal acknowledgement, and by being the focus of rituals, such as pilgrimage, prayer and petitions for aid and blessings, in the case of the Imams. The arbitrary nature of the relationship between a symbol and the thing it signifies is, of course, not limited to religious systems, as has been recognized at least since Ferdinand de Saussure. *Course in General Linguistics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 67-70.

¹¹⁷ See, for example Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, (London: Variorum Reprints 1985).

and cursing, though it is true that the Tenth Imam also resorted to assassination.¹¹⁸ The extent to which even these coercive mechanisms could effectively be used to police the ideological boundaries of the community was limited, for while extremists were cursed and excommunicated,¹¹⁹ the followers of the renegades developed hermeneutic methods that commuted the effects of the cursing and excommunication, retaining the symbolic authority both of the Imam who had issued the curse, and their cursed leader. For example, in the case of the al-Shalmaghānī, who was cursed by the Envoy Ibn Rawḥ, he was defended by his supporters, through recourse to the cosmological role of the ‘opposite’ (*ẓidd*) of the Imam (*walī*). As Ṭūsī records, “a poet from amongst them (God curse him) said, “Oh you who curse the opposite as an enemy, The opposite is nothing but the exterior of the *walī*...”¹²⁰ Thus hermeneutic esotericism insulated these sub-constituencies from more dominant, perhaps more rationalist interpretations of the statements of the Imams, allowing their distinctive beliefs and practices to co-exist. As long as all these sub-groups continued to recognize the symbolic authority of the same Imam, they constituted a single symbolic community, in the widest sense, and were bound together, necessitating that they should contest their varying interpretations of the Imam amongst themselves.

This framework gives us an important tool for understanding the role of the so-called ‘extremists’ in the Shi‘ī community. How is it possible that the Imam could sanction such beliefs if he did not hold them? This problem has led a scholar like Modarressi to deny that the *ghulāt* or the *mufawwiḍa* were part of the moderate mainstream of Imamis, but instead suggesting they

¹¹⁸ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 371-4.

¹¹⁹ See Etan Kohlberg, “*Barā’* in Shi‘ī Doctrine,” *JSAI* 7 (1986): 139-175.

¹²⁰ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 254-5.

were distorting the teachings of the Imam.¹²¹ On the other hand, Amir-Moezzi can argue precisely the opposite, suggesting that the gnostic, esoteric, initiatory trend in Imami Shi‘ism was the historical religion of the Imams themselves.¹²² However, instead of being drawn into an argument over the ‘true religion’ of the Imams, we must just accept that the Shi‘i community contained a number of different strands at different periods which were fruitfully productive through the dialectic they formed. All of these different strands could be accommodated precisely because their adherents all accepted the symbolic authority of the same Imam. At moments of crisis, when the succession to the Imamate was contested, one candidate for the Imamate was sometimes disproportionately supported by a particular tendency within the broad church of Imami Shi‘ism,¹²³ but more often than not, the major candidates for Imamate were supported by a variety of doctrinal groups, including those adhering to both rationalist and gnostic tendencies.¹²⁴

For the Imams themselves, their concerns were very likely quite different from those of their followers. The Imams could not participate in concerns of their followers such as the idea that the world would cease to function without an Imam,¹²⁵ and that they would not be purified without an Imam to collect their canonical taxes,¹²⁶ or that they would not achieve salvation without explicitly acknowledging a named Imam.¹²⁷ While they appear to have been concerned

¹²¹ See, Modarressi, *Crisis*, Chapter 2.

¹²² Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*.

¹²³ This appears to be the case with the support of the renegade *wakīl* Fāris b. Ḥātim and his followers for Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad, the son of Hādī, who later transferred their allegiance to Ja‘far ‘the Liar’. See discussion in Chapter 4.

¹²⁴ Thus for example, the *waqīfī* renegades at the time of the death of Kāzīm included both rationalistic and ‘*ghulāt*’ followers. See Buyukkara, “Schism”. Likewise Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, after the death of the Eleventh Imam, as we will see in Chapter 4. Also the Hidden Imam and the pro-Occultation *wakīls* were supported both by Nuṣayrī gnostics and anti-gnostics: see Chapters 7-8.

¹²⁵ See a statement of this creed in Kulayni Kafi, 329-330.

¹²⁶ See Chapter 2.

¹²⁷ See, for example Zurāra’s deathbed dilemma before it was clear who should succeed Ṣādiq. Takim, *Heirs*, 112.

with their reciprocal responsibilities to their followers, they also appear to have been motivated very much by their sensibility as the heads of the family of the Prophet, with an interest in gaining recognition of their leadership from other family members, and extracting recognition or seeking justice from the caliphal authorities.¹²⁸

As in the case of many lineage-based systems of authority, the Imami community was intrinsically fissiparous and every time an Imam died, the new candidates for Imam had to establish the legitimacy of their claims to the Imamate among the various different constituencies that formed the community. Each of these different constituencies had various different intellectual predilections that shaped the way they received the new Imam. For example, certain doctrines, once they had purchase within a certain subset of the Imami community, began to predispose different individuals and groups towards particular candidates at a moment of succession. Thus, the doctrine of *badā'*, which holds that God can change his rulings in response to fresh circumstances,¹²⁹ was applied after the disconcerting moment in which, Ismā'īl, the designated successor of Ja'far al-Şādiq, predeceased his father. This was reactivated at certain points in the future and shaped the way in which particular doctrinal factions of the Imami community responded to practical questions of succession, in particular when Abū Ja'far Muḥammad predeceased his father 'Alī al-Hādī, the Tenth Imam. Equally, the faḥīte doctrine that the Imamate can be passed between brothers as well as between father and son, established to allow Ismā'īl to pass the Imamate on to 'Abd Allāh al-Aftaḥ, predisposed those who continued

¹²⁸ For example over the case of the inheritance or control of the revenues from the lands of Fadak. See Laura Veccia Vaglieri, "Fadak," *EI2*.

¹²⁹ See Tritton and Goldziher, "*Badā'*," *EI2*.

to identify themselves as fāḥites towards the Imamate of Ja‘far ‘the Liar,’ upon the death of the Eleventh Imam in 260/874.¹³⁰

The Imam, in his turn, had to take account of the beliefs of his followers, especially during the early years when his claim to the Imamate was still fragile. The heresiographies mention splittists disputing every succession.¹³¹ Many of these splits persisted over several generations, forming new sub-constituencies which, in turn, had their own distinctive reaction to the candidature of new Imams. Upon the death of the Eleventh Imam, this same process of disputes, faction-formation and the reconstitution of the community upon the symbolic authority of a new Imam was initiated. It was at these crisis points in the Imamate that the personal charisma of the individuals involved – the Imams and their elite followers – was reactivated. Personal charisma might not be especially important when the Imamate of a particular Imam was accepted and the fiscal and epistemic institutions surrounding him could carry out their functions without overwhelming pressure, but when the identity of the next Imam was at stake, contestations between candidates for the Imamate, and also candidates to act as spokesmen for the Imamate, whether *bābs*, *wakīls* or scholars, relied both on personal charisma and institutional embeddedness to be resolved.

1.7.2 Charisma and representation

1.7.2.1 Weberian Charisma

Having raised the specter of charisma, we should perhaps ask the question, were the Imams really charismatic, in the Weberian sense in which it tends to be employed in history and

¹³⁰ See Chapter 4.

¹³¹ For a succinct summary of these splits, based on the heresiographies, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam: the History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi‘ism* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985), 45-60.

the social sciences? The word ‘charisma’ and ‘charismatic’ are often used in the field of Islamic history, in particular when dealing with the Shi‘i Imams and Sufi mystics, though perhaps not always with due circumspection. Charisma first entered into widespread academic as well as popular usage following the work of the German sociologist Max Weber, who adapted the term from its Christian theological usage denoting a gift from God.¹³² In the study of early Shi‘ism a number of scholars have invoked Weberian ideas of charisma. Liyakat Takim discusses the charisma of the Imams, and develops a framework for the understanding of charisma as having been routinized through the increasing importance of the Imams’ elite followers, the ‘*rijāl*’. Dakake calls the early Shi‘i community, “The Charismatic community”, and provides a useful discussion of the concept of Imamic authority and community solidarity through her discussion of *walāya/wilāya*, and briefly summarizes some of the interventions of Weberian ideas in the field of Islamic studies.¹³³ In particular, we can benefit from Dakake’s emphasis on the “reciprocal and relational nature of *walāyah*” which forms a clear link between the early Shi‘i conception of *walāya* and Weber’s conception of the contractual relationship between the charismatic individual and the charismatic community. Arjomand also looks at Shi‘i history through a Weberian lens, though his interests lie less with providing a deeper understanding of the effects of charismatic authority in early Shi‘i history, than with articulating a version of Weber’s teleological conception of progressive rationalization.¹³⁴ As I hope to show, the application of Weberian categories to the context of Shi‘ism continues to be a fruitful exercise in

¹³² John Potts, *A History of Charisma* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5-6.

¹³³ Maria Massi Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi‘ite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). The whole work is engaged with these issues, but in particular see 8-12, for a discussion of the fate of Weberian charisma in Islamic studies, and 15-31 for definitions and discussions of *wilāya/walāya*.

¹³⁴ Arjomand tends to associate charisma with extremist and chiliastic beliefs, see for example, “Consolation”.

allowing us to contemplate the forces at play in the relationship between the Imams and their followers.

Weber, in his *Economy and Society*, famously gives the following definition of authority:

There are three pure types of legitimate domination.¹³⁵ The validity of the claims to legitimacy may be based on:

1. Rational grounds – resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands (legal authority).
2. Traditional grounds – resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them (traditional authority); or finally,
3. Charismatic grounds – resting on the devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him (charismatic authority).¹³⁶

Weber goes on to say¹³⁷ that charismatic authority comprises of the following main components:

- Charisma is based on remarkable personal characteristics of the charismatic leader: strength, wisdom, insight, magical powers, which are considered to be god-given or divine in some way
- However, these characteristics are not necessarily patently obvious to all, but rather they are acknowledged by the charismatic community defined by that person's leadership. And

¹³⁵ Domination refers to the quality by which one's commands will be obeyed.

¹³⁶ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1: 215.

¹³⁷ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1: 241-245.

indeed charisma can be seen to have been withdrawn from the leader if the follower cease to perceive him as divinely inspired.

- Crucially, charismatic authority is a revolutionary force in society. It up-ends the more institutionalized mechanisms of Traditional Authority and Bureaucratic authority.
- Charisma can be routinized: that is, it can be made to transition to traditional authority or rational bureaucratic authority through the process of institutionalization, in particular as the qualities of the leader wane, or she or he dies, giving way to a process of succession.

1.7.2.2 Critique of Weberian charisma: 1. The technical embeddedness of charisma

It is notable that Weber's conception of the pure form Charismatic authority is very often rooted in examples of belligerent activity: the berserker, the war chief, and so on.¹³⁸ However, he tends to sidestep the fact that even military leadership rests upon a set of techniques that must be mastered before authority can be exerted. Weaponry must be wielded, muscles must be developed and speeches must be made. These elements must be coordinated, in practice, within particular technologies and idioms of battlefield conduct.¹³⁹

The legalistic-doctrinal authority of the Imams may not be of this sort, but it also depends on the mastery of a set of techniques and idioms, without which the personal charisma of an individual cannot exert itself. While we may accept that certain individuals may seem to possess apparently superhuman personal abilities, we must concede that these abilities must be mediated through a set of traditional structures of production of these techniques and idioms. This is at the root of Bordieu's critique of Weberian charisma, who substituted instead the concepts of 'symbolic capital' or 'symbolic power' which emerge not from any miraculous personal quality,

¹³⁸ Weber, *Economy and Society*, 2: 1112.

¹³⁹ See, Dow, "Weber on Charisma," pp....

but from the manipulation of a particular field: a particular context and history in which the individual is operating.¹⁴⁰ Charisma, then, should not be viewed as a particular kind of ability, as Weber implicitly suggested, but rather the ability of a particular individual to transcend a particular technology or vocabulary, albeit initially expressing him or herself through those techniques and idioms. The conditions of possibility for charisma to transcend must usually be a crisis or rupture in the current idioms. Thus charisma is not productive of rupture, but rather exploitative of rupture. Historical change is not produced by charismatic authority, but rather charismatic authority responds to historical change to assert a new set of dynamics and relationships which are restructured through the power of the charismatic contract. In spite of this readjustment of Weberian charisma, the contractual nature of charisma remains important. The charisma of an individual is only produced within a particular field, and through the recognition of the charismatic community.

1.7.2.3 Critique of Weberian charisma: 2. The epistemological function of representation of charisma

The mediated quality of charisma, the fact that it presents itself only through a set of pre-existent techniques and idioms, has a further aspect that is particularly relevant to our understanding of the Imams. This is the epistemological level that so concerned medieval hadith-transmitters: how do we know that the image presented of the Imam is indeed the correct one? An Imam cannot retain contact with all of his followers, his charismatic community, at once. Instead the believers must rely on intermediaries, appointed or self-declared who can transmit the charismatic image of the Imam to them. This has a generational aspect. While reports issuing regarding the charisma of an Imam during his lifetime may be the subject of doubt, this doubt is

¹⁴⁰ Tove Tybjerg, "Reflections on 'Charisma'," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 20 No. 2 (2007): 173-175.

compounded, or at least complicated by the passage of years. Nonetheless, the epistemological dimension is the same. If a group of followers witness a miracle, for example, as soon as the report has passed beyond the initial eyewitnesses it has the same status as a transmitted report and must be theoretically be subjected to the same criteria for verification. Thus the institutions which surround a charismatic figure during his or her life, and the literary mechanisms which preserve and elaborate upon this image posthumously are in some ways equivalent – both are ways of mediating the charisma of the leader to the charismatic community. As Weber emphasizes, the very preservation of charisma depends upon the fact that the community does not withdraw its recognition of that figure, and so this charisma is dependent upon this process of representation. Charisma is a contract between leader and community that is not based on objective personal qualities, but personal qualities as perceived by community. The contract can be dissolved, and charisma withdrawn.

Again, this factor of representation complicates the purity of the charisma of even the most charismatic figure. There is an epistemological equivalency between contemporary accounts and later hagiography. All of these phenomena surround a leader with a more or less calculated nimbus of charisma. Without this, the historical change which Weber saw to be the prerogative of charismatic authority could not be effective, and the berserker would remain a crazy person with an axe. In this sense, then, charisma must be mediated – must be routinized – for its very effectiveness as a force in history. Jesus would not have been charismatic without the apostles to represent his message, but not just the apostles, but the evangelists, and Paul and the whole mechanism of representation produced by the early church that ensured that the peculiar message of the Nazarene was preserved. No doubt there are objective personal qualities that exist: rhetorical skills, energy, self-belief, which lie at the root of the image created, but to create

a sharp distinction between charisma and its routinization is to contradict the fact that charisma is a contractual relationship between the charismatic leader and the charismatic community.

Nonetheless, if we accept the necessary of the mediated, represented nature of charisma, it still preserves its potential to act as a factor in historical change, though this is tied up with the pre-existing historical circumstances, and the capacity of a certain kind of charisma, expressed through certain techniques and idioms to address those historical circumstances. In particular, a moment of crisis will create the conditions of possibility for a charismatic individual to effect change.

1.7.2.4 Were the Imams charismatic?

If we refer these elements back to the case of the Imams, we find that the extent to which the Imams can be regarded as charismatic figures involved in a revolutionary, destabilizing force for historical change varies radically according to which Imam we are speaking of. Muḥammad was the original model for the establishment of the figure of Imam, and the early splits in the community from which the Shi‘i complaint rose were based upon divergent religio-political approaches to the question of post-prophetic authority. The early models of Shi‘i leadership were characterized by a high degree of charisma, as in the case of ‘Alī, Ḥusayn, and other figures of exceptional spiritual appeal who rose with the sword against worldly authorities. However, in Imami Shi‘ism, characterized by the *naṣṣ* designation of succession, charisma is restricted to more routinized forms. Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, identified by Twelvers as the fifth and sixth Imams respectively, were probably the founders of Imami Shi‘ism, and it was during their lifetimes that the doctrine of *naṣṣ* designation appears to have been formalized.¹⁴¹ This period was a moment in Islamic history in which charisma was liable to be reactivated, as

¹⁴¹ Hodgson, “Early Shi‘a,” 10.

the Umayyads faltered in the face of the growing pious opposition towards them.¹⁴² To what extent were Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far al-Şādiq invested with charisma? What did their authority consist of? The authority of Bāqir and Şādiq is depicted as consisting of exceptional piety and wisdom, in particular wisdom expressed in the legal and exegetical idioms. Both of these idioms are relatively well-established by earlier generations of Muslims, though the scripturalist basis for knowledge was coming increasingly to the fore at this period, and, in this sense, they are leaders who do not introduce radical change, but rather express their authority through traditional techniques. In addition, many miracles are attributed to these Imams, and their successors. However, here the question of mediation of the Imam’s activities and preservation of knowledge about the Imams comes to the fore. It is impossible to be sure if miracles were witnessed at the hands of the Imams, or if reports about their miraculous activities were produced gradually by those who were removed from the Imams, either geographically or temporally.

Another clue as to the extent to which Weber’s idea of charisma can be applied to the Imams lies in the establishment of the system of canonical tax-collection which we addressed in the previous chapter. Weber notes that “charisma rejects as undignified all methodical rational acquisition... for charisma is by nature not a continuous institution, but in its pure type the very opposite.”¹⁴³ The system of canonical tax-collection was certainly a form of “methodical rational acquisition,” which had a spiritual function, but certainly also an institutional function, guaranteeing loyalty and attesting to the stability and continuity of the Imamate to the wider community. Once it was established, then, the tax-collection network was the means for

¹⁴² See Chapter 2.

¹⁴³ Weber, *Economy and Society* 2:1113.

mediating the charisma of the Imam to the community. Under Bāqir and Sādiq, this system may have perhaps consisted largely of *ad hoc* contributions, that might be seen as consistent with the Weberian context, but certainly the statements of Šādiq attest to his justification of the collection of funds as rationally and predictably couched within a wider system of soteriology and social justice, and the secession of the *wāqifī wakīls* upon the death of Kāzīm clearly suggests that the system had reached a stage of institutionalization where its agents believed that they could continue to function even if the Imamate was effectively beheaded. Following al-Kāzīm, then, having created a legal theory to underpin Imami tax-collection, we can assume that Imami *wakīls* could collect taxes on the basis both the traditional inclination to fulfill the obligation to pay taxes) as well as the legalistic justification of this system through the interpretation of the scripture of earlier Imams. This is maintenance of charisma through the regularization of the sanctified economy of gift-giving and reception of blessings. In doing this, it is a move away from the pure form of personal charisma, into a routinized, regularized form whose charisma is increasingly dispersed amongst the appointed agents who form the network of canonical taxes-collectors. Increasingly the charisma of the Imams was of a symbolic nature, predicated not upon the personal characteristics of the Imams, but upon the systematic representation of the symbolism of the Imam to the community. Charisma was maintained through the elaboration of institutional forms, including the canonical taxes, ritual pilgrimages to the house and shrines of the Imams whose protocols are later compiled into texts such as Ibn Qūlūya's *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Qummī Ibn Qūlūya (Qawlawayh), *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt*, edited by Jawād al-Qayyūmī (Mu'assasat al-nashr al-islāmī, 1417 [1997]).

The Imam's distance from the community was supportive of the routinization of the Imamate, as the representation of the Imam could become independent of his personal charisma. And yet personal qualities do continue to be important, in different ways at different stages of Imami history. We may, perhaps suppose that it was at least partly through his personal qualities that 'Alī al-Riḍā was designated heir apparent by Caliph al-Ma'mūn. And when the first child Imam, the Ninth Imam, al-Jawād, succeeded to the Imamate at the age of seven,¹⁴⁵ it precipitated a different kind of crisis. Of course, a child can certainly be considered charismatic, as the example of the first Safavid king, Ismā'īl indicates, but in the Imami case, the personal qualities of wisdom and knowledge were still considered an important prerequisite for an Imam. That is to say, charisma was understood to be mediated by a particular set of techniques that had to be learned, at least in part, through traditional educational pathways: primarily the mastery of Qur'ān, hadith and Islamic legal norms and practices. Once these were mastered, however, the diffusion of Imamic charisma became increasingly rooted in the mechanisms through which the Imam was represented to the community: through the production and dissemination of oral or literary hadith reports. When the Tenth and Eleventh Imams were placed under house arrest by the caliphal authorities in the third/ninth century, this limited personal access to the Imam, which intensified the symbolic, mediated aspect of the Imam's authority for all but the handful of his followers who might gain access to his person.

1.7.2.5 The charismatic moment

The charisma of the Imams, then, was like all charisma, produced of necessity through a preexisting field of techniques and idioms, and, in addition the representation or mediation of charisma was crucial to its widespread efficacy. This mediation was successively formalized into

¹⁴⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 11.

a routinized form in the generations following the foundational figures of Bāqir and Šādiq. However, I want to argue that there continued to be a space for more truly charismatic leadership to assert itself within the institutions of the Imamate. As we have seen, the Imami community was intrinsically fissiparous, as *naṣṣ* designation did not definitively ensure the stable continuity of Imamic succession. This meant that at each generation, there continued to be factional splits and contestations. A candidate for the Imamate had to assert the validity his candidacy through established, though not fully formalized criteria. These criteria included various mechanisms for designation of an heir, slightly variant conceptions of lineage, wisdom (though the mechanisms for proving this wisdom were contested), personal purity and conduct, and the citation of signs and portents. These mechanisms were never sufficiently formalized to predict all possible circumstances and to prevent doubt. Thus, within these frameworks, the death of each Imam created a moment of instability in which personal charisma was reactivated as one of the mechanisms by which the followers of the Imam were bound to him in a charismatic contract that would later be rendered more or less obsolete through when the institutions surrounding the Imamate became stable once again. While there was no formalized process of the community's recognition of the Imam as in the case of Caliph's *bay'a*,¹⁴⁶ the community, in particular the elite of the community were involved in the recognition of the successful candidate for the Imamate. Without followers, the Imam could not be recognized as an Imam. Thus, the 'charismatic moment' of instability brought about by the moment of succession, ensured that, at least once a generation, the personal charisma of the Imam was called into question, and could lead to unexpected consequences. In this dissertation I focus on one such moment of instability: the

¹⁴⁶ E. Tyan, "Bay'a" *EI2*.

crisis following the death of the Eleventh Imam. In this case, the charismatic potential of individual claimants to Imamate – their ability to parley their personal mastery of the idioms of Imamate into effective authority – was tested, and found wanting. After the failure of visible candidates to the Imamate, events were determined partly by the charismatic potential of the agents of the Imams, who then took on quasi-Imamic role of directing the functions of the Imamate in the absence of an Imam.

Chapter 2: The *wikāla* and the Imami legal theory of canonical taxation

2.1 Overview

The *wakīls*, as we come to know them by the eve of the Occultation, did jobs for the Imams, carried his letters and issued his statements, but they appear first and foremost as collectors of the canonical taxes.¹ In this chapter I present an overview of the development of the theoretical development of the main categories of canonical tax which the Imam claimed the prerogative to collect. By the time of the Occultation, the Imami community had developed a distinctive system of collection and distribution of wealth which purified its participants from the taint of mammon, while providing them with a physical link to the Imam through the transmission of precious objects. It also supported the Imams financially, through the *khums* tax, and the community as a whole, through the *zakāt* tax which provided remittances paid to the poor, the needy and those in crisis. While *khums* and *zakāt* are separate categories and fulfil very different functions, both in their religious meaning, and in their recipients, they both appear to have been collected by the Imam, or at least the right to collect them was claimed by the Imam. While we should not conflate the two categories, then, we can see that they would have represented part of the sacred economy that connected the Imam physically to his followers, which was so important in providing continuity and a sense of connection to the Imamate in the early Occultation era. The resources controlled by the Imams before the Occultation, then,

¹ I use the words canonical taxes to denote those sources of revenue which are mentioned in the Qur’ān, and their derivatives, in particular *ṣadaqa*, *zakāt* and *khums*. *Zakāt* and *ṣadaqa* are also sometimes translated as “alms tax,” or “charitable contribution,” though I have chosen “canonical taxes” to indicate three main aspects: their status as legitimated through recourse to Qur’ān and hadith; the fact that they are supposed ideally to have been collected by the governmental authority of the Imam or Caliph; and the fact that there are a set of overlapping and mutating ‘tax’ categories indicated by the umbrella term, ‘canonical taxes’, including, but not limited to *ṣadaqa*, *zakāt* and *khums*, as we shall see. It should be emphasized that while *ṣadaqa*, *zakāt* and *khums* delimit particular legal categories, none of these reflect static practical realities, but instead, are sources of legitimation of revenue collection and/or charitable practices at different times and places.

provided the foundation for the resources claimed by the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya* in the early Occultation period, who continue to claim the right to collect the canonical taxes due to the Imams,² and to distribute them to their proper recipients, as they saw fit. This financial system as a whole could, no doubt, be used as a means of extending patronage towards those whom the Imam wished to help or reward.

In this chapter we will turn our attention to understanding how this system was established over the course of several generations before the era of the Occultation. In order to do so, we must start with the Imamates of Muḥammad al-Bāqir (57-114 / 676-733) and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (83-148 / 702-765), the central figures around whom the early Imami community organized itself and first emerged as a distinctive sectarian community.³ The emergence of this community as a distinct group remains shrouded in obscurity, but, by reading the scattered statements of the Imams regarding the canonical taxes *zakāt* and *khums*, we may understand that the distinctive Imami taxation theories were established primarily under Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, during the period of general and mounting opposition towards the Umayyad dynasty in its final years, and during the early years of the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty, and consolidated under his son, Mūsā al-Kāẓim. Due to the fact that the Imami Imams and their followers, unlike the Zaydi Imams, ultimately did not take the step to actively rival caliphal governmental authority, in order to generate community revenues, a fiscal structure was developed that did not directly challenge governmental tax collection, albeit it implicitly called the legitimacy of the Caliph into doubt. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq did claim the right to collect *zakāt*, which appears to represent something of a

² Though around the time of Abū Ja‘far, the ‘Second Envoy’, a dispensation was granted with regard to the *khums*. See Chapter 7.

³ See Hodgson, “Early Shi‘a.”

challenge to the revenue-collecting prerogatives of the caliphal authorities. The extent to which Ṣādiq's position with regard to *zakāt* is revolutionary or not, however, must be seen in the light of Umayyad taxation practice. Sijpesteijn has suggested that the Umayyads themselves may have been innovating through the decision to make the collection of *zakāt* a prerogative of the government, rather than an individual duty, a step which many Muslims, whether Shi'ī or not, reacted against.⁴ Ultimately, however, the Imami Shi'ī followers of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq stopped short of revolutionary action (at least until the rise of the Ismaili Shi'ī *da'wa* in the late third/ninth century). Instead of rivalling the caliphal state, Imami tax theory produced a system that shadowed the state revenue collection and recreated the Imami Shi'a as a community within a community organized through a separate fiscal-sacral economy centered upon the figure of their own Imam. These community revenues were maintained by creating distinctive new Imami categories of taxation/canonical tax-collection: initially by reconceptualizing *zakāt/ṣadaqa* and, eventually, by focusing on the *khums* as a revenue category which was reserved for the discretionary use of the Shi'ī Imam alone, as opposed to *zakāt* which posed the difficulty that it was not licit for the Imam's personal use, nor for the use of the family of the Prophet in general.

In the earliest phase of Shi'ism there were two major issues regarding taxation and revenues that caused resentment. Firstly there was resentment amongst the relatives of the prophet towards the Caliphs' misappropriation of the birthright of Fāṭima (in particular the lands of Fadak), an issue which was most upsetting to the descendants of Fāṭima themselves;⁵ and secondly, there was a more widespread resentment against early caliphal policies regarding the distribution of booty, which excluded the division of lands among the fighters, in favor of taxing

⁴ Petra Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: the World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 195, and more generally 181-214.

⁵ See Laura Veccia Vaglieri, "Fadak," *EI2*.

these lands to provide revenue for the public treasury.⁶ Fiscal issues continued to form an important bone of contention in opposition to the Umayyads right up until the ‘Abbasid revolution.⁷ Such fiscal matters were incorporated into the anti-Umayyad narratives regarding the Umayyad Caliphs’ moral corruption, luxurious lifestyle, and misappropriation of the property of the Muslims, which created the background to the revolutionary moment during the lives of Bāqir and Ṣādiq when Shi‘i-inspired opposition to the Umayyads eventually toppled them and instituted the ‘Abbasid dynasty who claimed to execute Islamic legal systems more faithfully.

With this backdrop, Ṣādiq, in particular, made a number of crucial theoretical advances that allowed for the creation of an autonomous Imami system of community finance. Between the lifetime of Ṣādiq and his son, Mūsā al-Kāzīm, several theoretical developments were made to establish the Imam’s prerogative to collect a number of different kinds of revenue, in the name of the Muslims. Firstly, the Shi‘i Imam was claimed to be the most rightful recipient of *zakāt*, not because he would use it himself (indeed it was forbidden to the family of the Prophet), but because he would ensure it would go to its proper recipients. Alongside this development, Ṣādiq used Qur’ānic interpretation to carve out other revenue categories proper to the Imam, including “the known duty” (*al-ḥaqq al-ma‘lūm*), and gifts to the Imam (*ṣilat al-imām*). However, it was not these categories that were to become central areas of concern to Imamis, but rather the *khums*. There are several stages in the development of *khums* from the Qur’ānic concept of a fifth of the booty taken in warfare, to the distinctive Occultation-era Twelver concept of a one-fifth tax on the income of mines, trade, agriculture and crafts. The major ones that occurred during the lifetime of the Imams were as follows. Firstly there was a conflation of various revenue

⁶ See Hodgson, *Venture*, 1:213. Daniel Dennett, *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 20.

⁷ See Hodgson, *Venture* 1:270-2.

categories that were taxed at the rate of a fifth (*khums*). In particular the *zakāt* tax on mines and minerals from the sea (levied at the rate of a fifth) was conflated with the fifth of booty.

Additionally there was another fifth: the fifth of revenue from the ‘*anfāl*’ lands which were the birthright of Fāṭima. Perhaps more important was the reinterpretation of the meaning of the Qur’ānic verb *ghanima*, “what you gain” to refer not just to the spoils of war, but also to income in a more general sense. This reinterpretation occurred at the time of Ṣādiq and Kāẓim, but only appears explicitly and comprehensively formulated in the works of Occultation-era jurists.

In tandem to these theoretical developments in the legal literature, our historical, biographical and heresiographical sources corroborate these developments by indicating the great importance of the *wakīls* who collected the tax/canonical taxes of the Imami community for the first time, following the death of Kāẓim. Taken together, these developments give as a clearer picture of the role of community finances in producing institutions that were to be instrumental in the generation of the doctrines and institutions of Twelver Shi‘ism in the Occultation era.

2.2 The Qur’ānic origins of Islamic canonical taxation

When Muslim jurists of the Second-Third/Eighth-Ninth centuries set out to produce a coherent yet canonical Islamic system of taxation they turned to the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān is far from providing a coherent tax code, but it does contain the key terms which the jurists used to assess the legitimacy of the *de facto* taxation practices which had developed in the earliest years of Muslim caliphal administration. Imami jurists were important interlocutors in the discussion over the correct interpretation of the Qur’ānic categories of taxation. Secondary scholarship on Imami theories of revenue collection has hitherto focused almost exclusively upon the category

of the *khums* (fifth) that was reserved for the Imam.⁸ However, all Islamic canonical categories of revenue collection need to be considered together as a system. The category of *zakāt/ṣadaqa* is equally central to this discussion of Imami tax theory as the category of *khums*.

The origins of the theory and practice of Islamic canonical taxation lie first in the polity of the Prophet Muḥammad, and later the developments made to fit the administration of the rapidly-expanding empire of his caliphal successors. These developments were justified through a number of key passages in the Qur’ān, and the reports of the actions of the Prophet and the early Caliphs. While references to religious taxation are scattered throughout the Qur’an, in particular, two adjacent suras of the Qur’ān contain the most sustained discussion: Sura 8 “The booty” (*al-anfāl*), and Sura 9 “Repentance,” (*al-tawba*). In Sura 9, *zakāt* is mentioned in the context of a severe polemic against Muḥammad’s enemies. The giving of *zakāt* is portrayed as a marker of religious identity, establishing what it means to be Muslim, distinguishing Muḥammad’s loyal Muslim followers in Medina from those who were unwilling to spend their money and their lives in supporting him, as well as from the pagans who maintained the old religious customs in Mecca.⁹ *Ṣadaqa* and *zakāt* are used largely synonymously both in the Qur’an as well as in the later legal literature.¹⁰ The key passage later used to establish the right of the Caliph/Imam to exact tax on the community was Qur’ān 9:103:

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

⁸ Norman Calder does have an article on *zakāt*, “Zakāt in Imāmī Shī‘ī Jurisprudence, from the Tenth to the Sixteenth Century A.D.” *BSOAS* 44, No. 3 (1981): 468-480, though as its title suggests, it does not discuss pre-Occultation developments.

⁹ Q 9:1-20. Religious reward is seen to come not to those who remained in Mecca, even though they maintain the traditional religious actions of maintaining the haram of the Ka’ba and

¹⁰ However, *ṣadaqa* is also used with a distinctive valency, both in the Qur’an and in later legal literature. In addition, the *zakāt/ṣadaqa* dichotomy is established later to indicate the difference between obligatory and voluntary giving. See Weir/Zysow, “Ṣadaqa,” *EI2*.

Take *ṣadaqa* from their property to purify them and cleanse¹¹ them by that, and pray for them. For your prayers are reassurance for them. And God is hearing and knowing.¹²

This verse establishes the taking of *ṣadaqa* as an imperative command by God, suggesting its obligatory nature. The words *ṣadaqa* and *zakāt* are both represented in this verse, albeit *zakāt* is only in the verbal form *tuzakkī-hum*, “to purify them”. It provides a cogent religious logic for taking *zakāt*. Though *zakāt* may be levied on worldly goods, its purpose is to purify the giver. Verse 9:60 mentions the recipients of the *zakāt*:

إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَاتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْعَامِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمَوْلَىٰ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَارِمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَابْنِ
السَّبِيلِ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

The *ṣadaqāt* are for the poor and the wretched and for those employed to collect it and for the ones whose hearts are brought together, and for [freeing] slaves, and debtors, and in God’s path, and for the wayfarer – an obligation from God. And God is knowing and wise.

A category of recipient like ‘the poor’ is self-evident, but others are more difficult to interpret, and much effort was later spent in debating the exact nature of these recipients. Clearly, however, this verse suggests a social redistribution of wealth from the active, thriving members of the Muslim polity, to those who were less-well off.

The Qur’ān does not designate a specific type of property upon which *ṣadaqa* and *zakāt* should be levied. However, there is a separate set of categories in the Qur’ān dealing explicitly with the profits of war. War booty is referred to in the Qur’ān verses by various terms, including

¹¹ Or perhaps, “cause them increase.”

¹² I have made my own translation of the passages of the Qur’ān, in order to best illustrate the discussion in this chapter, however I have made extensive use of the translations of Arberry (*The Koran Interpreted* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964)) and Ali (*The Qur’an Translation* (Elmhurst, N.Y. : Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 2001)).

anfāl, *ghanīma* and *fay*, which later gained nuanced juristic definitions.¹³ Verses referring to these categories are concentrated in particular in Sura 8, “The Booty” (*al-anfāl*). Crucially for our discussion here, the specifically Imami Shi‘i category of *khums* was derived from the same verses. Sura 8, “The Booty” (*al-anfāl*) opens with the following statement:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَنْفَالِ قُلِ الْأَنْفَالُ لِلَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ فَأَتَقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَصْلِحُوا دَاتَ بَيْنِكُمْ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

They ask you, about the spoils of war. Say, “The spoils are for God and the Messenger.”

So fear God and amend that which is between you and obey God and His Messenger, if you are believers.¹⁴

However, this clearly did not imply that the Prophet was to appropriate all the booty won by his fighters, and indeed, the Prophet’s share in the war booty is specified in the Sura 8:41:

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا غَنِمْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ خُمُسَهُ وَلِلرَّسُولِ وَلِلَّذِي الْفُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ...

And know that anything you gain, then indeed, one fifth of it is for God and for the Messenger and for close relations, and the orphans, the needy, and the traveler...

In this formulation, then, the right of God and the Prophet to the war booty¹⁵ is affirmed, but two things are added: the specification of one fifth (*khums*) as the share which would be levied upon the spoils to fund the welfare of the community; and an indication of who the recipients of this welfare would be. Note that some of the recipients of this fifth (*ibn al-sabīl* and the *miskīn*) appear identical to the recipients of *zakāt*,¹⁶ suggesting that the categories for the collection and

¹³ These boundaries between these categories in the Qur’ān are vague, allowing much room for later jurists to argue about interpretation. See Paul Heck, “Taxation,” *EQ*; Rudolph Peters, “Booty,” *EQ*.

¹⁴ Qur’ān 8:1.

¹⁵ Here ‘booty’ is referred to in the verbal form related to *ghanīma*, rather than *anfāl* as in the previous quotation.

¹⁶ See Norman Calder, “*Khums* in Imāmī Shī‘ī Jurisprudence, from the Tenth to the Sixteenth Century A.D.,” *BSOAS* 45, No. 1 (1982): 39-47, for later Imami jurists’ solution to the perceived difficulty in interpreting this overlap.

redistribution of wealth among the Muslims were initially fluid and ultimately fell to the discretion of the Prophet.

2.3 Tax theory in the context of resistance to the Umayyad Caliphs

With the expansion from Muḥammad's nascent polity to the full extent of the Umayyad caliphate in the First/Seventh and Second/Eighth centuries, taxation practices and categories developed rapidly to incorporate the revenues of newly-conquered territories. In the conquered territories, there was a transition of the revenue base from booty and tribute to the taxes levied on landowners, in particular on the proceeds of agricultural and pastoral produce. In establishing a tax system for this newly established Islamic empire, previous arrangements established by the Byzantine and Sasanian rulers in addition to treaty agreements with the conquerors surpassed the categories mentioned in the Qur'ān, though the Qur'ān was occasionally invoked to justify particular policies. Thus, several authorities discuss how 'Umar, at the time of the conquests of the rich tax-producing agricultural lands of the Sawād, introduced an innovation in arguing that lands conquered were to be regarded not as movable booty to be divided up, but rather as immobilized lands to be taxed in order to provide ongoing revenue for the Muslim community as a whole, based on his interpretation of the Qur'ānic usage of *fay'*.¹⁷ This step initially caused grumbling among the Arab conquerors, and though these complaints were probably shortlived,

¹⁷ Lambton, defines the *fay'* as "the collective plunder made into a kind of pious or beneficial trust for the benefit of the whole community, present and future," in "*Kharāj*," *EI2*. The early caliphs found they needed to replace the Qur'ānic stipulations for *zakāt* and *ghanīma* with taxation based on land categories, more fully reflecting the needs of the administration of an agrarian empire, rather than the original booty-financed Muslim polity. Dennett describes 'Umar's decisions on the administration of the land in the Sawād, noting that 'Umar's immobilization of conquered land to provide the tax base for the *kharāj* land tax, rather than letting it be divided up among the fighters as was expected, was the subject of complaint amongst the Muslim conquerors. This immobilization was based on the reinterpretation of the Qur'ānic word *afā' al fay'*. See Dennett, *Poll Tax*, 21-22. Note also that several hadith depict 'Alī as agreeing with the principle that conquered lands should not be divided up between the conquerors, but instead should provide tax revenue for the Muslim community. 'Abd al-'Azīz Dūrī, *Early Islamic Institutions: Administration and Taxation from the Caliphate to the Umayyads and Abbasids* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), 88-9.

the debate about fair taxation and redistribution of the taxed wealth continued to be a significant element in the political conflicts of the Umayyad period.

Imami Shi‘ism and Sunnism both emerged in an atmosphere of foment and resistance to the Umayyad caliphate.¹⁸ As the opposition to Umayyad rule crystallized, taxation theory became increasingly important to the claims made against Umayyad legitimacy. There is evidence both in the literary record and in Egyptian papyri that the Umayyads attempted to governmentalize the collection of the *zakāt/ṣadaqa* alms tax which had become an individual obligation, and this innovation appears to have generated resistance. Sijpesteijn notes that,

Protests in reaction to a systematic *ṣadaqa* collection voiced in a debate amongst second-/eighth-century Sunnī scholars concentrated on the question whether one had to pay one’s *ṣadaqa* and/or *zakāt* to the Muslim rulers... or whether one could divide it oneself in appropriate ways (*mawāḍi‘*), amongst those entitled to it.¹⁹

In this context, the Umayyads were accused of misappropriating the wealth of the rightful recipients of the *ṣadaqa/zakāt* and the *anfāl/ghanīma* specified in the Qur’ān, in particular in the passages 8:41 and 9:60 discussed above. In making this claim, a new spirit of juristic precision was applied to the Qur’ān which must have conflicted with the early pragmatic administrative practices of the first caliphs, and this textualist rigorism was joined to piety-minded criticism of

¹⁸ In this discussion of the pious opposition to Umayyad and later ‘Abbasid rule, I follow Hodgson, in particular, *Venture 1*: 241-279; and Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964). It should be noted that Steven Judd has provided a salutary critique of the oversimplified image that, “put simply, the ‘Abbaasids were religious; the Umayyads were not,” and that Hodgson’s idea of the ‘piety-minded opposition’ to the Umayyads implied that the scholarship of the ḥadīth scholars and legal scholars under the Marwanids was “inherently subversive, if not openly revolutionary.” *Religious Scholars and the Umayyads: Piety-minded Supporters of the Marwānid Caliphate* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 5. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I do not require that all the piety-minded must be understood to have been in opposition to the Umayyads, but merely that anti-Umayyad opposition was an important crucible for the forging of new kinds of scripturally-based thinking which united various groups of what later came to be understood as Shi‘i and Sunni thinkers.

¹⁹ Sijpesteijn, *Piety-minded Supporters*, 195. Sijpesteijn notes that mentions of this innovation in *ṣadaqa* collection are concentrated around the caliphate of Hishām, 213-4.

the luxurious lifestyles of the caliphs. Nonetheless, the volume and complexity of *zakāt* and *kharāj* stipulations enunciated in the proto-Sunni and Shi‘i hadith compilations clearly show that the legal system of Shi‘i and proto-Sunnis must have largely reproduced extant taxation categories, though seeking to alter and justify them through the Qur’ānic categories in a way that had not been systematically done previously. After the fall of the Umayyads, this process was accelerated under the ‘Abbasids, whose ideology had been formed in dialogue with Shi‘i and proto-Sunni resistance to Umayyad rule. While Sunnis came to grudging acceptance of an ‘Abbasid caliphate that sought to justify its legitimacy through the very terms and ideals developed by the piety-minded proto-Sunni jurists, Shi‘i law began to diverge due to the disappointment at the creation of a caliphate based on the ‘Abbasid dynasty, rather than an ‘Alid dynasty.²⁰

2.4 Key terms of the legal theory of canonical Islamic taxation

The Islamic law of taxation, then, whether Sunni or Shi‘i, derives from the Qur’ānic and hadith-based justifications of and amendments to existing caliphal law. As different taxation arrangements were made in different areas conquered by the Muslims, there was a great deal of complexity in the use of the various terms that denote taxation categories. Speaking broadly, *zakāt* and *ṣadaqa* are largely synonymous in the legal compilations²¹ and come to mean the collection of a percentage of the property of Muslims drawn from agriculture and animal husbandry, specie, and other types of property. *Zakāt* is formally distinguished from the land-tax levied on conquered non-Muslim lands, known as *kharāj*, but in practice it is likely that there

²⁰ Hodgson, “Early Shi‘a.”

²¹ *Zakāt* is usually referred to in the hadith as *ṣadaqa*, though these reports are often organized into chapters under the rubric of *zakāt*. There is also a type of *ad hoc* charitable gift known as *ṣadaqa* which is distinct from the mandatory *zakāt*. In addition, there is a distinct obligatory *ṣadaqa* paid on the holiday of *‘īd al-fīṭr*.

may have been overlap and confusion between the *zakāt* levied on the agricultural produce of lands owned by Muslims and *kharāj* paid by non-Muslim, or formerly non-Muslim lands. *Anfāl*, *ghanīma* and *fay'* refer in the Qur'ān to the spoils of war, but come to be distinguished into separate categories of these spoils. There is an ambiguity over the categorization of mines, minerals, pearls and buried treasure. These discovered products are discussed both as *ghanīma* or *anfāl* in the Shi'ī legal compilations, but also appear under discussion in chapters on *zakāt*, indicating an ongoing resistance of these categories to be neatly classified by the jurists.

By the time of the Occultation, Imami jurists eventually came to argue that *ghanīma* referred not only to a proportion taken from the one-off wind-fall gains of war, but from all ongoing income from trade and agriculture as well as the profits of mines, and that all of these should be taxed at the rate of a fifth (*khums*).²²

This broad conception of *ghanīma* does not, however, exist explicitly in the statements of the Imams, but developed gradually, and only was fully theorized after the era of the living Imams, as we shall see. Particularly innovative was the conception of *ghanīma* as daily profit, which was initially understood as the one-off spoils of war, though was soon extended to other kinds of windfalls or discoveries.

There were other canonical taxes in the system of Islamic canonical taxation, such as *jizya*, usually understood as a poll tax levied upon the conquered non-Muslims at a rate determined by the ruling Caliph or Imam, and also other more ritual, pietistic voluntary charitable contributions, usually referred to under the word *ṣadaqa*, but to be distinguished from the *ṣadaqa* which is synonymous with *zakāt*, meaning *obligatory* taxes or alms. In addition, for

²² See, for example, Abū al-Ṣalāḥ al-Ḥalabī, *Al-Kāfi fī al-fiqh*, edited by Riḍā Ustādī (Isfahan: Maktabat al-imām amīr al-mu'minīn 'Alī, 1403 [1982-3]), 170.

later jurists referring back to Qur'ān and hadith, the tax categories found in scripture are sometimes understood as types of land, rather than classes of property. In particular the *anfāl* which appear to simply mean booty in the Qur'ān, come to refer to 'anfāl' lands which were conquered without fighting and became the patrimony of the Prophet. For the Imami jurists it was important to distinguish *anfāl* which belonged to the Prophet and the Imams after him, from the *fay'* lands which, became the patrimony of all Muslims, through providing *kharāj* tax revenue for the state.²³ Among the Shi'a, we see Zaydis, who had a practical interest in the administration of autonomous realms, placing great emphasis on the land-based tax categories.²⁴ In this land-based system of classification, the *fay'* lands upon which the *kharāj* was levied, are those lands initially owned by conquered non-Muslims, but continue to be *kharāj* lands even if bought by Muslims.²⁵ The *kharāj* tax levied on the *fay'* lands was, in its classical formulation, understood as a flat-rate tax according crop type, to be distinguished, therefore, from the tenth (*'ushr*) levied upon lands as a share of the crop at harvest time. The *'ushr* was levied upon land which had been distributed amongst the Muslims, and is therefore dealt with by jurists under the rubric of *zakāt*.²⁶ *Zakāt* is levied at a rate of a tenth on rain-fed agricultural lands. Non-Muslims were to pay either *jizya* or *kharāj*, or both, though in reality practices were probably more *ad hoc* and overlapping. Several Caliphs attempted reform in order to streamline and to justify the system more effectively.²⁷ There were also peace treaty-governed *sulḥ* lands: non-Muslims who surrendered on some particular terms were to be governed by the particular tribute agreement made at the time, rather than paying another category of tax. The *anfāl* are seen as lands

²³ See Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:543.

²⁴ See Yaḥyā b. Ḥusayn, al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq, *Kitāb al-aḥkām fī al-ḥalāl wa-al-ḥarām* (Ṣa'da: Maktabat al-turāth al-islāmī, 2003), 1:177-181.

²⁵ Though this changed under the administrations of different Caliphs. See T. Sato, "'Ushr.'" *EI2*.

²⁶ F. Løkkegaard, "Fay'," *EI2*.

²⁷ T. Sato, "'Ushr,'" *EI2*.

conquered without fighting (literally, without horses or mounts), empty lands, or lands belonging to no-one, as well as the crown estates of conquered lands, and these all belong directly to the Imam/Caliph and are levied at the rate of a fifth (*khums*), leading to the Imami association of these lands with other tax categories levied at a fifth.²⁸ This is a summary of the major points of a complex system, whose ambiguities were contested between the jurists of the time.

See below for a table summarizing the main points.

²⁸ See Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:543.

Table 2: Canonical taxation categories classed according to tax type and land type

Tax type	
<i>ṣadaqa/zakāt</i>	Tax on total wealth of Muslims who own above a certain amount, levied at different rates on agricultural produce, livestock, gold and silver
<i>ghanīma/ maghānim</i>	Initially, the spoils of war, later also extended to other kinds of one-off windfalls and discoveries, including the fifth (<i>khums</i>) levied on the produce of mines, minerals, discovered treasure and pearls from the sea. Note that <i>anfāl</i> appears to have been largely synonymous with <i>ghanīma</i> (Q: <i>maghnam</i>) initially, but was later classified as a type of land. (See below).
<i>kharāj</i>	Land tax initially on non-Muslims, later on the conquered land, whoever it happened to be owned by. The rate of taxation was at the discretion of the leader of the Muslims, usually at a rate fixed according to type of crop and area under cultivation, as opposed to
<i>‘ushr; pl. ‘ushūr</i>	the <i>‘ushr</i> .
<i>Jizya</i>	Literally, a “tenth”: a land tax, but based on a share of the crop, rather than a fixed rate like the <i>kharāj</i> . A poll-tax on non-Muslims who submitted to Muslim rule

Land type	
<i>Kharāj/fay</i> ' lands	Land conquered and divided between Muslims..
<i>anfāl</i> lands	<p>Land conquered without fighting (lit. without horses or mounts), empty lands, or lands belonging to no-one, as well as the crown estates of conquered lands.</p> <p>These all belong directly to the Imam/Caliph and are levied at the rate of a fifth (<i>khums</i>).</p>
Lands governed by peace-treaty (<i>sulḥ</i>)	These lands are taxed according to the tribute agreement arranged under the terms of the treaty.

This table does not fully represent the detail, overlap, historical development and conflicts over categories, and in particular, as we will see, the Imami discussion of taxation law made various significant steps to reinterpret taxation law in the light of changing ideologies and practical changes in the Imami community. The central umbrella term under which much of this is discussed in the legal works is *ṣadaqa* or *zakāt*, which usually is the principal chapter in legal works under which discussion of many of these categories occurs, and is the central tax levied on Muslims as part of their religious duty.

2.5 The beginnings of Imami taxation law

The Imami legal theory of taxation, then, originates at the time when Imami Shi‘ism itself first becomes visible as a distinctive ideological entity during the tempestuous era of changeover between the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid caliphal dynasties. Hodgson, highlighted this moment between the dynasties, during the lives of Imams Bāqir and Ṣādiq, as the moment in which the

“early Shi‘a became sectarian.” In what follows, I will largely corroborate Hodgson’s theory regarding the crystallization an Imami identity at this moment, but based upon a different source base than Hodgson’s largely doctrinal and narrative hadith,²⁹ showing that, in addition to the establishment of distinctive doctrines, Imami identity was crucially cemented by the community-based organization of fiscal autonomy originating in civil disobedience towards the caliphal taxation system. It is precisely through their distinctive responses towards Umayyad and ‘Abbasid taxation systems that the Imams Bāqir and Ṣādiq established a community which, through its inward-turned fiscal-ritual structures, became a distinctive sect. My research therefore marks a shift towards the sociological understanding of a community structured through legal, geographical, political and social facts, rather than just categories of belief.³⁰ In the course of this shift in perspective, it becomes necessary for us to significantly alter the picture of the development of Imami Shi‘ism as being not merely quietist, but rather engaged in tacit civil disobedience.³¹ While it is very difficult to directly correlate theory and practice, three key facts will become clear in the analysis that follows. Firstly, the Imami Shi‘i Imams did develop a distinctive theory of ideal Islamic taxation in which *zakāt* was seen to be only licitly collected and distributed by the Imami Imam, instead of the caliphal government. Secondly, *khums* was gradually separated out from the general theory of booty-taxation as including a share of money that was reserved for the Imam’s own use. Thirdly, whatever inevitable gap between

²⁹ Hodgson, “Early Shi‘a.”

³⁰ Hodgson’s insights were based largely on the analysis of historical and heresiographical narratives, but not legal sources. Hitherto, Shi‘ism has community has largely been treated by scholars as a matter of belief. A notable exception is Najam Haider, who emphasizes importance of ritual praxis and social facts such as mosque attendance, see *Origins*, especially 215-248.

³¹ This, then, calls for a reconception of the ubiquitous dichotomy between quietism and activism of militancy. See, for an example of this, Denis McEoin, “Aspects of Militancy and Quietism in Imami Shi‘ism,” *Bulletin of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* 11, No. 1 (1984): 18-27.

theory and practice, the Imams were demonstrably collecting and redistributing wealth from their followers, and developed a corps of agents to do this.

The discussion about the *khums* has loomed large in scholarship on Shi'ī financial networks. Hussain, Buyukkara and Wardrop, for example, all assume that the primary category of money collected by the agents of the Imams was the *khums*, without giving attention to the historical development of the category of the *khums*.³² Modarressi, does mention *ad hoc* contributions to the Imams also, but he does not develop his picture of the financial network beyond a general overview.³³ The prevailing focus on the *khums* presents an incomplete picture, as the development of the category of *khums* cannot be understood without understanding the overall framework of *zakāt*, the heated discourse surrounding the *anfāl* lands, and other taxes. Even scholarship on *khums* is characterized by major lacunae, as secondary literature on the subject tends to focus on the classical theories developed from the fifth/eleventh century onwards, leaving the initial development of *khums* theory by the Imams and their circles largely untouched.³⁴ One of the central questions that I will address regarding the Shi'ī theory of the *khums*, is how and why did the Imami Shi'a come to develop a distinctive theory of *khums*? If the Shi'ī hadith corpus can be trusted to give us valid information on this development (and in what follows I will show why I believe it can) it was the Imams Ṣādiq and Kāẓim, and their circles, who developed the core of the innovative theory of canonical taxes that became a distinctive principle for the structuring of the Imami community, though these principles were only fully systematized during the Occultation period. Indeed, Bāqir, Ṣādiq, and Kāẓim (the first

³² Jassim Hussain recognizes the function of the *wikāla* network was to collect *khums*, *zakāt*, and other revenues due to the Imam, but devotes little attention to the development of these as legal categories. See *Occultation*, especially 36, 79-83. Buyukkara, "Imami-Shi'ī Movement"; "Schism"; Wardrop, "Lives," especially 178-184.

³³ Modarressi, *Crisis*. 13-16.

³⁴ See Calder, "*Khums*"; "Structure"; Sachedina "*Khums*"; Robert Gleave, "*Khums*," *EI2*.

who can properly be called Imams in the developed sense of Imami Shi‘ism) may be said to have created the Imami community, in part through their origination of the principles that could legitimize the creation of a financial network – principles which remain crucial to the financial structures of various Shi‘i institutions up till the present day.

2.6 Shi‘i tax theory before Bāqir and Ṣādiq

Resistance to the perceived injustices of caliphal revenue collection appears to have been central to many revolts against Umayyad authority since the early days of Islam. Shi‘i revolts were no exception. Andrew Marsham gives some examples of revolutionary mutterings in defiance of caliphal innovations regarding *fay*:

Contests among Muslims over the resources of the early empire generated many of the internal conflicts of the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries, and abuse of the *fay*’ is the subject of recurrent complaints attributed to groups dissatisfied with their place in the new elite. Al-Ḥusayn (d. 61/680) is said to have accused the Umayyads of “claiming exclusive possession of the *fay*” (al-Ṭabarī, 2:300). Fair distribution of the *fay*’ is said to have been one of the principles upon which Zayd b. ‘Alī’s (d. 122/740) followers pledged allegiance (al-Ṭabarī, 2:1687). Conversely, those holding power are said to have invoked the *fay*’ as a right to be defended against rebels: in 66/685 the Qurashī Ibn Muṭī‘ warned his supporters that the followers of the rebel al-Mukhtār included five hundred “of your own freed slaves [having] no right to your *fay*” (al-Ṭabarī, 2:627). A closely related idea is found in the *ḥadīth* that *lā yu’ammāru* (or *lā yaliyanna*) *mufā’ alā mufiy*’, “a person made tributary shall not rule over the one making him so”—or, more idiomatically, “a freed slave shall not rule over an Arab.”³⁵

³⁵ Andrew Marsham, “Fay” *EI3*.

In addition to general discontentment with the division of resources amongst the Muslim elite, there are two specific areas of complaint that appear to date back to before the time of Bāqir and Ṣādiq, and which can be linked to a broad Shi‘i milieu. Firstly, the sense of resentment felt by family of the Prophet for having been dispossessed of their birthright. This goes back to the claim that after the death of the Prophet, the Abū Bakr misappropriated Fatima’s legitimate claim to the lands conquered without a fight that had belonged to the Prophet, in particular Fadak.³⁶ The second area of complaint was the claim, based on the Qur’ān that the family of the Prophet had a right to the fifth of the profits of war, perhaps stemming from the earliest claims that the distribution of war booty was unfairly managed in general. For the descendants of the Prophet, the question of where such revenues went was all the more significant because they were prohibited from receiving any aid from *zakāt*.³⁷

2.7 Bāqir and Ṣādiq on *zakāt*

Much of the Umayyad tax system was incorporated into the increasingly systematized legal theory developed by the jurists of the Second/Eighth century, including Shi‘i jurists. Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq were prominent men of religion and, widely recognized as legal authorities during the crisis-torn final years of the Umayyad caliphate, and the early years of the ‘Abbasid dynasty. Their statements on taxation must be seen in the context of these times. The piety-minded juristic movement to which Bāqir and Ṣādiq belonged was, on the whole, hostile, or at least ambivalent towards Umayyad power. This ambivalence prompted the question among both Shi‘i and proto-Sunni scholars: was it legitimate to pay *zakāt* taxes to an unjust ruler? The juristic literature on *zakāt* indicates a spectrum of responses to this question

³⁶ Veccia Vaglieri, “Fadak,” *EI2*.

³⁷ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 4: 58-9.

from amongst the pious opposition. In general the Sunni jurists were more tolerant of governmental practices, upholding the obligation to pay *zakāt* to the Caliph even if he were a sinner (*fāsiq*). There are detailed discussions among Sunni jurists of the factors which might influence the decision to pay governmental *zakāt* or not, such as the case of sin or '*fisq*' of the Caliph.³⁸ If the Caliph's Imamate was judged to be invalid, then, this would lead to the individual believer taking upon him or herself the burden of distributing the *zakāt* to its proper recipient. The suggestion that an individual believer was legitimately able to set aside and distribute his own *zakāt* created a new theoretical paradigm of individualistic piety.

One might well wonder how it could be possible for people to decide to distribute the alms themselves individually, rather than paying it as taxes to the governmental taxation system. Was this system operating effectively? It is possible that the older forms of taxation, *in primis*, *ṣadaqa/zakāt*, had fallen into desuetude following the initial conquests, with governmental attention being focused on the collection of the *kharāj* land tax and perhaps also by newer non-canonical forms of revenue.³⁹ But tax reformers like 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz continue to place emphasis upon *ṣadaqa* as the central tax type to be levied on Muslims.⁴⁰ In addition, we know from papyri that *ṣadaqa/zakāt* was indeed collected and distributed by governmental authorities, at least in Egypt, possibly suggesting a revival of the centralized governmental collection of

³⁸ See, for example Ṭūsī, *Khilāf*, 2:32-3, in which Ṭūsī summarizes the positions of al-Shāfi'ī and Ibn Ḥanbal. According to Ṭūsī, both al-Shāfi'ī, and Ibn Ḥanbal and most of the hadith folk believed that the sinning (*fisq*) of a Caliph did not invalidate their Imamate, while many of the jurists, including the companions of al-Shāfi'ī believed that sinning would invalidate an Imamate, presumably thereby making the payment of *zakāt* to him impossible. For the Shi'a, of course, a sinning Imam was a contradiction in terms. These opinions, however are later than the time of the Shi'i Imams, and further study is necessary to uncover the spread of opinions regarding the payment of *zakāt* among the earliest proto-Sunni and Sunni jurists.

³⁹ Such as *rusūm* (see Cahen, "*Kharāj*," *EI2*), and *mukūs* (see W. Björkman, "*Maks*," *EI2*). However, this subject is too little studied to make any clear determinations about it. It is true that 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz is recorded as having reaffirmed the operation of *ṣadaqa* as the only kind of tax paid by Muslims; see Peter C. Hennigan *The Birth of a Legal Institution*, 72. It is likely that this

⁴⁰ 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz is recorded as having reaffirmed the operation of *ṣadaqa* as the only kind of tax paid by Muslims, see Peter C. Hennigan, *The Birth of a Legal Institution* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 72.

these canonical taxes.⁴¹ This gives the discussions regarding the payment or non-payment of *zakāt* to the authorities a potentially subversive tone. Whether Sunni or Shi‘i, the argument that it was not legitimate to pay *zakāt* to the caliphal authorities implies an oppositional stance towards the state.

2.7.1 *Zakāt/ṣadaqa*: distribute it yourself

The early Shi‘a theory developed in the circle of the Imams in the mid-second/eighth century incorporates the assumption that an individual could take it upon himself to distribute *zakāt* on his own behalf, present in Sunni discussions. In this assumption the Shi‘i theorists were part of a general movement that separated individual piety from one’s obligations towards the state. The statements of Bāqir and Ṣādiq, however, suggest a far greater intransigence regarding the caliphal government institutions, though stopping short of the Zaydi position of explicitly endorsing armed resistance to the Caliphs. A number of elements of the Imami attitude to *zakāt* should be picked out here. Firstly, the Caliphs are not seen as legitimate collectors of *zakāt* at all. Secondly, given that *zakāt*-distribution then becomes the responsibility of the individual believers, they were responsible for ensuring that it should go to its proper recipients. In the Imami scheme only Shi‘a count as rightful recipients of *zakāt*, or of the voluntary alms (*ṣadaqa*) apart from a few exceptions and dispensations: If you do not know someone’s religious affiliation, then you can give them *ṣadaqa*, but if you know of any flaws in their religion then these will present an obstacle to your giving to them:

⁴¹ Petra Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: the World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013) 188-195.

علي بن إبراهيم ، عن أبيه ، عن حماد بن عيسى ، عن حريز ، عن سدير الصيرفي قال : قلت لأبي عبد الله (عليه السلام) :
 (: أطلع سائلا لا أعرفه مسلماً ؟ فقال : نعم أعط من لا تعرفه بولاية ولا عداوة للحق إن الله عز وجل يقول : " وقلوا
 للناس حسنا " ولا تطعم من نصب لشيء من الحق أو دعا إلى شيء من الباطل.

Sudayr the money-changer said: I said to Abū ‘Abd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq], “Should I feed a Muslim beggar whom I do not know?”

He said, “Yes, give to one whom you do not know in *walāya*,⁴² but not [someone with] enmity to the truth. Indeed God said, “Speak well of people!” Do not nourish someone who is hostile (*naṣaba*) to any part of the truth or who calls to (*dā‘ā*) any part of heresy (*bāṭil*).”⁴³

In another tradition, giving to someone you do not know is allowed, but in that case the payment is capped at only four small silver coins (*dāniq*⁴⁴).⁴⁵ The specification of the confessional identity of the recipients of *zakāt* and *ṣadaqa* may have merely reinforced existing practice to give within a community, but its explicit articulation must have had the effect of increasingly crystallizing the boundaries between communities.

The third factor of their distinctive attitude to *zakāt* is that Bāqir and Ṣādiq state that anyone who converts to follow the rightful Imam should ideally pay back-taxes for all the *zakāt* paid to the illegitimate authorities:

علي بن إبراهيم ، عن أبيه ، عن ابن أبي عمير ، عن عمر بن أذينة ، عن زرارة وبكير ، والفضيل ، ومحمد بن مسلم ، ويريد العجلي ، عن أبي جعفر وأبي عبد الله (عليهما السلام) أنهما قالوا : في الرجل يكون في بعض هذه

⁴² That is, someone who is a fellow Shi‘i, having recognized the charisma of the Imami Imam.

⁴³ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 4:13.

⁴⁴ A *dāniq* (pl. *dawāniq*/ *dawānīq*) is a small silver coin, equivalent to one sixth of a dirham. For a discussion of the relative weights of dirhams, *dāniqs* and *mithqāls*, see Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim Ibn Sallām, *The Book of Revenue* (Kitāb al-amwāl) (Reading, U.K.: Garnet, 2005), 480-1.

⁴⁵ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 4:14.

الأهواء الحرورية والمرجئة والعمانية والقدرية ثم يتوب ويعرف هذا الأمر ويحسن رأيه أيعيد كل صلاة صلاها أو صوم أو زكاة أو حج أو ليس عليه إعادة شئ من ذلك؟ قال : ليس عليه إعادة شئ من ذلك غير الزكاة لا بد أن يؤديها لأنه وضع الزكاة في غير موضعها وإنما موضعها أهل الولاية.

‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm [reported] from Burayd al-‘Ijlī from Abū Ja‘far [al-Bāqir] and Abū ‘Abd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] they spoke regarding a man who belongs to one of those heresies (*ahwā*); the Ḥarūriyya [i.e. Khārijites], the Murji‘a or the ‘Uthmāniyya or the Qadariyya, then repents and knows this affair [the Imamate], and amends his opinion: should he repeat every prayer he prayed or fast or *zakāt* or *hajj*? Is it not incumbent upon him to repeat some of that? [The Imam] said, “He need not repeat any of that except the *zakāt*, which he must pay, because he gave the *zakāt* to someone other than its proper recipients, for its proper recipients are only the people of *walāya* [i.e. the Shi‘a].⁴⁶

This is a remarkable position to take, setting a high bar for conversion to the Imami sect, and assuming the total invalidity of the ritual payment of *zakāt* during one’s adherence to another religious persuasion. This position is somewhat attenuated according to circumstance,⁴⁷ but nevertheless, during the time of Baqir and Sadiq the Shi‘i discourse on canonical taxes reflects an the explicit statement of a formal division between confessional groups, establishing matters of belief as determinants of ritual practice, and therefore also powerful determinants of social boundaries. The ritual implications extend beyond *zakāt* itself, for it was understood that unless *zakāt* was paid in its proper place, prayer would be invalidated.⁴⁸ This report is also interesting from the perspective of dating, as the ‘heretical’ groups mentioned are noticeably rooted in the

⁴⁶ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3:545.

⁴⁷ This hadith is followed by one in which Ṣādiq states that if a man does his best to identify the appropriate recipient, but he cannot, then he need not pay his *zakāt* a second time, Kulaynī, *Kāfī* 3:545.

⁴⁸ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3: 499, 506.

Umayyad era, giving the report a sense of authenticity which is unlikely to have been fabricated at a later period.

The danger of non-payment of *zakāt* was no little matter, for as we have seen from the Qur'ānic statements, *zakāt* is tied up with one's very identity as a Muslim. Because of this, without proper *zakāt*, or even prayer, the majority of Muslims were destined for damnation:

... عن رفاعة بن موسى أنه سمع أبا عبد الله (عليه السلام) يقول : ما فرض الله على هذه الأمة شيئا أشد عليهم من الزكاة وفيها تهلك عامتهم.

... Rafā'a b. Mūsā [said] that he heard Abū 'Abd Allāh [Ṣādiq] (AS) say: "God imposed nothing upon this community graver than *zakāt*, and the majority of them perish in it."⁴⁹

This suggests, again, that only the Shi'a are paying *zakāt* correctly. Taken as a whole, the Imami stance on *zakāt* implied the increasing separation between communities: separation in this world as well as the next.

When and how did this separation take place? Was the exclusive attitude to the recipients of *zakāt* an early position that Bāqir and Ṣādiq continued, or was it an innovation that occurred at their time? One interesting hadith indicates that it may have been an innovation during the Imamate of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, as is the case with so many key changes in the community:

وروى حريز ، عن زرارة ، ومحمد بن مسلم أنهما قالا لأبي عبد الله عليه السلام : " رأيت قول الله عز وجل " إنما الصدقات للفقراء والمساكين والعاملين عليها والمؤلفة قلوبهم وفي الرقاب والغارمين ، وفي سبيل الله وابن السبيل فريضة من الله " أكل هؤلاء يعطى وإن كان لا يعرف ؟ فقال : إن الامام يعطي هؤلاء جميعا لأنهم يقرون له بالطاعة ، قال زرارة : قلت : فإن كانوا لا يعرفون ؟ فقال : يا زرارة لو كان يعطى من يعرف دون من لا

⁴⁹ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3:497.

يعرف لم يوجد لها موضع ، وإنما يعطى من لا يعرف ليرغب في الدين فيثبت عليه ، فأما اليوم فلا تعطها أنت وأصحابك إلا من يعرف ، فمن وجدت من هؤلاء المسلمين عارفا فأعطه دون الناس

Ḥurayz reported from Zurāra and Muḥammad b. Muslim that they both spoke to Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ṣādiq] (AS): “Do you see the verse, “The *ṣadaqāt* alms are for the poor and the wretched and the workers appointed to administrate them...” Are all of those people given to, even if they do not know?” And [Ṣādiq] replied: “Oh Zurāra, if only those who know were given to, to the exclusion of those who do not know, then not enough proper recipients would be found for the alms. And we only give to the one who does not know in order to encourage him in faith, and make him firm in it. But as of today, you and your companions must not give to anyone but someone who knows. Whoever you find among those Muslims who is knowing, then give to him rather than the rest of the people...”⁵⁰

This is rather elliptical, as is common with Shi‘i hadith, but it seems that ‘the people who know’ here must refer to those who know who the rightful Imam is; that is those who are followers of Ṣādiq, or, as we might begin to say at this period, the Imami Shi‘a. Ṣādiq appears to be announcing a change of policy. Up until now, though it has been preferable to pay *zakāt* only to faithful followers of the Imam, it has not been practically possible to limit one’s alms only to other Shi‘a. However, at this moment, Ṣādiq announces that *zakāt* should no longer be paid to the non-faithful, perhaps even excluding fellow Shi‘a like Zaydis who do not recognize the unique authority Ṣādiq himself. This hadith still presupposes that the Shi‘a are not paying *zakāt* either to the Caliph or to the Imami Imam, however, as we shall see, this latter position is modified by hadith that explicitly state that the believers should pay their *zakāt* to the Shi‘i Imam for distribution.

⁵⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Faqīh*, 2:4-7.

2.7.2 *Zakāt/ṣadaqa*: pay it to the Imam

While some of the statements of Bāqir and Ṣādiq on *zakāt* assume the individual's autonomous distribution of their own *zakāt* as alms, there are also a number of reports that suggest that *zakāt/ṣadaqa* were to be paid directly to the Imam. Interestingly, the Imam's collection of money is several times mentioned with a hint of resistance from his followers. Is this a suggestion that Ṣādiq was imposing a new kind of burden upon his followers? For example, one hadith emphasizes that the Imam was not in personal need of money, perhaps to still wagging tongues:

قال أبو عبد الله عليه السلام : من زعم أن الإمام يحتاج إلى ما في أيدي الناس فهو كافر، إنما الناس يحتاجون أن يقبل منهم الإمام ، قال الله عز وجل : " خذ من أموالهم صدقة تطهرهم وتزكّيهم به."

Abū 'Abd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] (AS) said, "Whoever claims that the Imam is in need of what is in the hands of people, is an unbeliever (*kāfir*). Rather, the people need the Imam to receive from them: God said,⁵¹ "Take *ṣadaqa* from their wealth to clean them and purify them through it."⁵²

In another report, the sense of resistance regarding Ṣādiq's collection of money is made even more explicit:

ابن بكير قال : سمعت أبا عبد الله عليه السلام يقول : إني لأخذ من أحدكم الدرهم وإنني لمن أكثر أهل المدينة مالا ما أريد بذلك إلا أن تطهروا.

Ibn Bukayr reported: I heard Abū 'Abd Allāh [Ṣādiq] (AS) say, "Indeed, I take a dirham from one of you, and even though I am one of the wealthiest people in Medina, in doing so I wish nothing else than that you should be purified."⁵³

⁵¹ Q 9:103.

⁵² Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 1:537.

⁵³ Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 1: 538; Ibn Bābūya, *Faḥīh*, 2: 44.

Reading between the lines, this suggests that there were people saying, “Why is Ṣādiq collecting money from his followers, even though he is one of the wealthiest men in Medina?” This hadith does not mention either *ṣadaqa/zakāt* or *khums* explicitly, but the mention of purification is consonant with the function of *zakāt*. The question as to exactly why Ṣādiq was collecting money is still an important and mysterious one. For the meantime, however, we must be contented to conclude that Ṣādiq was collecting *zakāt* himself, as well as other less-canonical gifts and alms, presumably some of it to fund his establishment, and to redistributed some of it as alms, on the behalf of his followers, as he saw fit. Of course, as a member of the family of the prophet, he was not allowed to use it for himself, and yet by direction the *zakāt* of his followers through his own administration, he was centering the ritual and financial focus of the community upon himself. Thus, we should not underestimate the significance of collecting *zakāt*. Combined with the increasingly uncompromising prohibitions upon distributing money to non-Shi‘a, this would have the effect of setting the Imami Shi‘a apart from others as a ritual and economic community. It would also require the creation of the apparatus to administer the collection and redistribution of these funds. That is, it would imply the creation of something like the *wikāla* network, albeit in an embryonic form.

This suggests that indeed, Ṣādiq was collecting some of the Islamic canonical taxes: either *zakāt* or the fifth (*khums*) of the booty. It is, of course, possible that these were merely *ad hoc* gifts to the Imam, but the purificatory function seems to suggest a more formal ritual categorization of the money given to the Imam, consonant with the Qur‘ān’s mention of the purificatory function of *zakāt/ṣadaqa*. As we have seen from the question of the beggar whose faith is not known, there are clearly situations in which it was expected of the Shi‘a to discern

whom to give their *zakāt/ṣadaqa* for themselves, though it is possible that this referred more to the voluntary *ṣadaqa*, rather than the obligatory *zakāt/ṣadaqa*.

2.7.3 Dispensations

While Imami juristic hostility to caliphal *zakāt* collection is well established, it is combined with a strain of pragmatism, in which the Imams grant a dispensation to those whose lands have already been taxed by the Caliphs. See for example the following statements from Kulaynī's chapter "On what the Sultan takes in the way of *kharāj*":⁵⁴

عن يعقوب بن شعيب قال : سألت أبا عبد الله (عليه السلام) عن العشور التي تؤخذ من الرجل أychتسب بها من زكاته ؟ قال : "نعم إن شاء".

Ya'qūb b. Shu'ayb said: I asked Ṣādiq about the *'ushūr* [i.e. the *zakāt* or *kharāj* tax on agricultural lands] which are taken from a man: does he account them as part of his *zakāt*? And he said, "Yes, [God] willing."⁵⁵

In this hadith, then it appears that taxes taken by the caliphal authorities – perhaps implying force – do constitute a legitimate substitute for his canonical *zakāt*. This seems to conflict with the statement above regarding payment of back-taxes when one converts to Imami Shi'ism, perhaps suggesting different opinions or stages of the development of the Imami legal theory, though it might also imply that once one has converted, there are factors beyond the control of the committed believer. Several other hadith repeat the point that *zakāt* taken through coercion by the authorities is to be counted to the canonical taxes.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, if you are able to refrain from paying *zakāt* to the caliphal authorities, you must do so:

⁵⁴ Note here the conflation between *kharāj* and the *'ushūr* tithes which are properly considered a part of *zakāt*.

⁵⁵ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3:543.

⁵⁶ "Sahl b. al-Yasa'ū reported that he, when he founded Sahlābād, and he asked Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā [al-Kāzīm] about what is taken [by the authorities] as tax from it, then what [canonical taxes] is due upon it? And [the Imam] said, "If the Sultan takes *kharāj* from it, then nothing is incumbent upon you, but if the Sultan does not take

عن أبي عبد الله (عليه السلام) في الزكاة فقال : ما أخذ منكم بنو أمية فاحتسبوا به ولا تعطوهم شيئاً ما استطعتم
فإن المال لا يبقى على هذا إن تزكيه مرتين.

Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Sādiq] (AS) said regarding *zakāt*: “Whatever Banū Umayya takes from you, that is counted [towards your *zakāt*], but do not give them anything if you are able, for the property does not remain in spite of this (?) if you pay *zakāt* twice.”⁵⁷

Here, then, a dispensation is being granted regarding the forceful extraction of taxes, though, but that in the case of voluntary action, the Shi‘a are still forbidden from paying *zakāt* taxes to the authorities. It is important to note that, again, a specifically Umayyad context that is mentioned, supporting the thesis that this kind of civil resistance through tax-evasion was initiated within the context of the pious opposition to the Umayyads.

These hadith suggest that the Shi‘a had to face difficult choices regarding *zakāt* payment. While the moral idealism of resisting Umayyad *zakāt*-collection was an important part of the Imam’s message, it had to be balanced with pragmatism regarding the needs of their property-owning followers. It is very likely that there were conflicting views within the Imami community regarding how actively to resist caliphal taxation.

There are other examples of reports which, taken as a whole, strongly suggest a generational change between the policy of Bāqir and his son, Šādiq. The men who transmitted these reports appear to have needed to explicate a change in practice or policy between the two

anything from it, then you must pay out from it the tithe (*‘ushr*) [i.e. *zakāt* on agricultural crop].” Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3: 543-4. See also the following hadith: “I asked [Šādiq] about the man who inherits land or buys it and pays its *kharāj* to the Sultan. Is the tithe (*‘ushr*) incumbent upon him? [The Imam] said, “No.”” Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3: 543. In another hadith we are told, “Abū al-Ḥasan [presumably al-Kāzīm] (AS) was asked about a man from whom those ones (*hā’ulā’*) [i.e. the caliphal authorities] took the *zakāt* of his property or the fifth of his booty (*khums ghanīmatihi*) or the fifth of what comes to him from the mines: is that considered in his *zakāt* and his *khums*? [The Imam] said, “Yes.” Ibn Bābūya, *Faḡīh*, 2:42. This hadith is also discussed below.

⁵⁷ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3:543.

Imams. In the following hadith, Ṣādiq appears in the role of a questioner to his father's role of Imam:

سليمان بن خالد قال : سمعت أبا عبد الله (عليه السلام) يقول : إن أصحاب أبي أتوه فسألوه عما يأخذ السلطان
فرق لهم وإنه ليعلم أن الزكاة لا تحل إلا لأهلها فأمرهم أن يحتسبوا به فجال فكري والله لهم ، فقلت له : يا أبة إنهم
إن سمعوا إذا لم يذك أحد فقال : يا بني حق أحب الله أن يظهره

Sulaymān b. Khālid said: I heard Abū ‘Abd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] say, “My father [Bāqir]’s companions came to him and asked him about [the taxes which] the Sultan takes, so he felt compassion for them (*fa-raqqa lahum*), though of course he knew that *zakāt* is not licit except for its proper recipients, and he ordered them to count it [as part of what they need to pay for *zakāt*] and by God! I continued to cogitate about them, and I said to him, “Oh father! If they listen to you, then not one of them will pay *zakāt*!?” And he said, “Oh my son! That is a duty/tax (*ḥaqq*) that God prefers to make manifest (*yuzhiruhu*).”⁵⁸

This is a difficult passage, but it is clear that Bāqir is allowing his followers to count what the Sultan appropriates as counting towards their canonical *zakāt*, even though the illegitimacy of the Caliph means that the *zakāt* might not go to its proper recipient, thereby in theory making their ritual duty invalid. It is interesting to note the depiction of a tension between Ṣādiq’s idealism and Bāqir’s pragmatic dispensation to allow the payment to the illegitimate Caliph to fulfil ritual requirements, regardless of its ultimate destination. In this sense Bāqir appears to fit into the framework of discussions which exist among Sunni jurists, rather than the classical Imami opinion which regards only payments to the true Imam, that is the Shi‘i Imam, as legitimate.

⁵⁸ Kulayni, *Kāfī*, 3:543.

Şādiq, then, is pushing further towards separating out a distinctive Imami policy, moving gradually towards something that would be recognizable as the classical Imami position.⁵⁹

In another statement in which Şādiq speaks about his relationship with his father's teachings, Şādiq is asked about the Qur'ānic *ghanīma* verse (8:41), and Şādiq glosses the verse as follows:

هي والله الإفادة يوما بيوم إلا أن أبي جعل شيعة في حل ليزكوا.

“[*Ghanīma*] is, by God, profit from day to day (*al-ifāda yawman bi-yawmin*), except that my father gave his Shi'a a dispensation (*fī ḥillin*) to pay *zakāt*.”⁶⁰

This hadith is, again, rather elliptical, and we will return to it again below for its significance with regard to the theory of *khums*. Let it suffice us to say here that, again, Şādiq appears to be indicating some kind of generational change in policy towards *zakāt*, suggesting that Bāqir was perhaps more tolerant about his followers paying *zakāt* to its improper recipients (the Umayyads or non-Shi'a needy) while Şādiq, on the other hand regarded his father's policy as a mere temporary dispensation from his own more uncompromising line. Notably, the *zakāt* theory of the Zaydi Imam Yaḥyā even less compromising than Şādiq's, as he states that even if the illicit ruling authorities seize *zakāt* by force, it still has to be paid to its proper recipients.⁶¹ But Yaḥyā's is the kind of statement that a ruler of his own state can afford to make, for there are fewer inevitable conflicts for his subjects to pay *zakāt* to him in the context of a Zaydi state in Yemen. Bāqir and Şādiq had to walk a finer line if they were to continue to live amongst their community while coexisting with the caliphal authorities.

⁵⁹ For this position, see Ṭūsī, *Khilāf*, 2:32-3, and above.

⁶⁰ Kulayni, *Kāfī*, 1:544.

⁶¹ *Aḥkām*, 1:192.

2.7.4 Creative accounting: experimenting with the canonization of new revenue categories

In addition to making the apparently innovative step of encouraging his followers to pay *zakāt* directly to him, Ṣādiq also appears to have been experimenting with the creation of other categories of revenue, justified through Qur’ānic interpretation. One of these is the “acknowledged duty” (*al-ḥaqq al-ma’lūm*) which appears in the Imami legal compilations as an additional alms that is incumbent upon rich men, though discretionary.

عن أبي بصير قال : كنا عند أبي عبد الله (عليه السلام) ومعنا بعض أصحاب الأموال فذكروا الزكاة فقال أبو عبد الله (عليه السلام) : إن الزكاة ليس يحمد بها صاحبها وإنما هو شئ ظاهر إنما حقن بها دمه وسمي بها مسلما ولو لم يؤدها لم تقبل له صلاة وإن عليكم في أموالكم غير الزكاة ، فقلت : أصلحك الله وما علينا في أموالنا غير الزكاة ؟ فقال : سبحان الله أما تسمع الله عز وجل يقول في كتابه : " والذين في أموالهم حق معلوم للسائل والمحروم"⁶² قال : قلت " ماذا الحق المعلوم الذي علينا ؟ قال : هو الشئ يعمله الرجل في ماله يعطيه في اليوم أو في الجمعة أو في الشهر قل أو كثر غير أنه يدوم عليه

Abū Baṣīr said: We were with Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ṣādiq] (AS), and with us were some the people of money (*aṣḥāb al-amwāl*) and they mentioned *zakāt* and Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ṣādiq] (AS) said: “The payer of *zakāt* is not praised for it, for it is only an obvious thing (*shay’ zāhir*), and his blood is spared by paying it, and by paying it he comes to be called a Muslim. If he did not pay it, his prayer would not be accepted. However, something is incumbent upon your money other than *zakāt*.” I said, “May God benefit you! And what is incumbent upon us other than *zakāt*?!” He replied, “Praise God! Have you not heard God (AJ) say in his book, “And the people in whose money is the known duty (*al-ḥaqq al-ma’lūm*) towards the beggar and the deprived one?”” [Abū Baṣīr] said: I said “What is the ‘known duty’ incumbent upon us?”[Ṣādiq] said, “It is what a man does with his

⁶² Q 70:24-5.

money, giving it every day, or every Friday, or once a month, a large or small amount...⁶³

In this anecdote, then, Šādiq appears to be experimenting with the introduction of categories to justify further alms payments. A number of elements should be emphasized here. The first is the audience: a group of ‘people of money.’ This is tantalizing. Were these merely rich men? Or were they men appointed to collect canonical taxes? Perhaps they were moneychangers, an important group within Ja‘far’s following, as Asatryan has shown.⁶⁴ Certainly Ja‘far’s comments do not appear to be idle remarks of general application, but rather targeted at a particular constituency of financially influential men amongst his followers. The second important point here is that it is innovative. Ironically, the meaning of the ‘known duty’ is actually rather unknown to Šādiq’s auditors, so that Abū Baṣīr is forced to ask “What is this ‘known duty’ incumbent upon us?” Thus Šādiq appears to be arguing for the existence of a further category of Qur’ānic (therefore canonical) payment, in addition to the well-established categories understood under the aegis of *zakāt/ṣadaqa*. We can see this as an early stage in the kind of legal-exegetical thinking that ultimately results in the creation of the Imami *khums* as a separate category.

The ‘known duty’ is referred to in another hadith:

عن رجل من أهل ساباط قال : قال أبو عبد الله ، (عليه السلام) لعمار الساباطي : يا عمار أنت رب مال كثير ؟ قال : نعم جعلت فداك ، قال : فتؤدي ما افترض الله عليك من الزكاة ؟ فقال ؟ نعم ، قال : فتخرج الحق المعلوم من مالك ؟ قال : نعم ، قال : فتصل قرابتك ؟ قال : نعم ، قال : وتصل إخوانك ؟ قال : نعم ، فقال : يا عمار إن المال يفنى والبدن يبلى والعمل يبقى والديان حي لا يموت ، يا عمار إنه ما قدمت فلن يسبقك وما أخرت فلن يلحقك

⁶³ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3:499.

⁶⁴ Mushegh Asatryan, “Bankers and Politics: The Network of Shi‘i Moneychangers in Eighth-Ninth Century Kufa and their Role in the Shi‘i Community,” *Journal of Persianate Studies* 7 (2014): 1-21.

One of the people of Sābāt said: Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ṣādiq] said to ‘Ammār al-Sābātī, “Oh ‘Ammār, are you very wealthy?”

He replied, “Yes, may I be your sacrifice⁶⁵.”

[The Imam] said, “And do you pay what is required of you in the way of *zakāt*?” He replied, “Yes.”

[The Imam] said, “And do you pay the ‘known duty’?”

He replied, “Yes.”

[The Imam] said, “And do you make gifts to your relations?”⁶⁶

He replied, “Yes.”

[The Imam] said, “And do you make gifts to your brethren?”⁶⁷

He replied, “Yes.”

[The Imam] said, “Oh ‘Ammār, Money disappears, and the body becomes wasted, but deeds remain, and the pious man (*dayyān*) is ever-living, never to die. Oh ‘Ammār, what you have done is without precedent, and what you will do, will not be followed”.⁶⁸

Again, this report also suggests that the ‘known duty’ was a kind of payment that Ṣādiq was seeking alongside *zakāt/ṣadaqa*, a discretionary payment, but nonetheless a payment that had clear soteriological consequences in its payment or its non-payment – especially for the very wealthy among his followers, who might otherwise, perhaps, be placed in a perilous “eye of the needle” situation with regard to their salvation, given the weight of material goods they have amassed. In order to solidify his Imamate Ja‘far and his supporters appear to have required

⁶⁵ This is a conventional form of address to the Imam

⁶⁶ This refers to the ad hoc, non-obligatory form of *ṣadaqa*, as opposed to the obligatory *zakāt*.

⁶⁷ Presumably referring to the Shi‘a, his brothers in faith. This also refers to the non-obligatory form of *ṣadaqa*.

⁶⁸ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3: 501.

funds, and this needed justification through the creation of an intellectual category. The ‘known duty’ appears to be one example of this, though not one with much longevity.

This hadith is also noteworthy in its omission of the category of *khums*. While it is always dangerous to make an argument from silence, especially given the non-systematic nature of this genre of exhortatory statements, nonetheless, it is telling that in this hadith, the *khums* is not mentioned where you might expect it alongside these other canonical forms of Qur’ānically-justified payments. This is a particularly glaring omission in this context where the Imam is asking the wealthy ‘Ammār for a comprehensive account of his pious expenditures. Surely if the classical Imami category of *khums* had been established by this time, ‘Ammār would have been asked if he had paid it. This omission suggests strongly, that, though Ṣādiq was experimenting with the creation of revenue categories that he could legitimately control, the distinctive Imami *khums* was a later development.

In addition to the ‘known duty,’ another category mentioned is the ‘gifts to the Imam’ (*ṣilat al-imām*), which is the title of a subchapter in Kulaynī’s *Kāfi*.⁶⁹ It is true that several of the hadiths in this chapter in fact refer to *zakāt/ṣadaqa*, rather than establishing a separate category, there is also the mention of ‘gifts to the Imam’, as a separate category, justified through recourse to a passage from the Qur’ān which is different from those passages used to justify *zakāt/ṣadaqa*. These hadiths strongly emphasize the benefit to making gifts to the Imam:

عن المفضل بن عمر ، عن الخيري ويونس بن ظبيان قالوا : سمعنا أبا عبد الله عليه السلام يقول ما من شيء أحب إلى الله من إخراج الدراهم إلى الامام وإن الله ليجعل له الدرهم في الجنة مثل جبل أحد ، ثم قال : إن الله تعالى

⁶⁹ *Kāfi*, 1:537-8.

يقول في كتابه : " من ذا الذي يقرض الله قرضا حسنا فيضاعفه له أضعافا كثيرة " قال : هو والله في صلة الامام
خاصة

Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar reported from al-Khaybarī and Yūnus b. Zabyān that they said: We heard Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ṣādiq] (AS) say, “There is nothing more beloved of God than paying dirhams to the Imam, and God will make the dirham a mountain like Uḥud for him in Paradise.” Then he said, “God (T) says in his book, “Who is that who will pay God a righteous loan, for God will multiply it many times!?””⁷⁰ He said: “That is, by God, about gifts made especially to the Imam (*ṣilat al-imām khāṣṣatan*).”

In this, then, Ṣādiq justifies gifts made out directly to the Imam (rather than being the *zakāt* which the Imam is forbidden from using for himself), using a passage of the Qur’ān which is not used in reference to *zakāt/ṣadaqa*, thus suggesting a unique canonical Qur’ānic category, and emphasizing the particular reward attached to such gifts. One other hadith in this chapter uses the same passage of the Qur’ān, and also pairs it with the phrase ‘gift to the Imam’ (*ṣilat al-imām*). Taken together with the hadiths regarding ‘the known duty’, these reports again suggest a process of free theorization about money paid to the Imam, in which the Qur’ān was being reread carefully to furnish experimental new categories of revenue for the Shi‘i Imam. This suggests that before the formation of the distinctive Imami category of *khums*, there was a process of speculation about revenue categories in general, from which process the *khums* was eventually generated. Thus, the Imam, or whoever was speaking in his name through these hadiths, was attempting to carve out a category of revenue that was the unique right of the Imam (*li-al-imām khāṣṣatan*), while leaving the well-established canonical category of *zakāt* in place. While ‘the known duty’ and ‘gifts to the Imam’ do not appear to have been fully theorized and reified in the

⁷⁰ *Kāfi*, 1:537.

way *khums* was to become later, nonetheless, all of these exegetical justifications of revenue collection belong to the same theoretical trend of justifying Ṣādiq's apparently innovative practice of collecting money directly from his followers.

It is important to highlight the significant role of the 'people of money' in these two anecdotes about the 'known duty.' Mushegh Asatryan has emphasized Ja'far's cultivation of wealthy, financially-influential people – in particular Kufan moneychangers. He paraphrases an important hadith about one such follower of Ja'far: the money-changer and esoteric thinker, Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fi:

The sixth Shi'i Imam Ja'far al-Sādeq (d. 765) was once approached by some of his followers who complained to him that a certain Mofazzal b. 'Omar Jo'fi was mixing with thugs and wine drinkers, and urged the imam to stop him. Known by the nickname 'Sayrafi', i.e. moneychanger, Mofazzal was well known among the Kufan Shi'is and much appreciated by Ja'far and by his son Imam Musā Kāzem (d. 799). Upon hearing the accusers, Ja'far wrote a letter, sealed it, and asked them to deliver it to him. They brought the letter to Mofazzal, and when he opened the seal and read it, instead of the imam's rebuke he found a request to purchase for the imam several things. When Mofazzal showed the accusers the imam's request, they told him that what he was asking for was too much for them to pay. Mofazzal then summoned his friends, who in no time collected the needed sum.⁷¹

This kind of anecdote is a clear suggestion of the importance Ṣādiq placed upon financial solvency, which provides the context of his development of innovative taxation and canonical tax categories through Qur'ānic exegesis. In addition to introducing a shift towards a severer policy

⁷¹ Mushegh Asatryan, "Bankers and Politics," 2.

towards paying *zakāt* to non-Shi‘a, Ṣādiq introduced new understandings of scripture that allowed for increased gifts to the Imams and a category of alms payment that seems to have been targeted particularly at very wealthy men: ‘the known duty’. With this backdrop, it should be no surprise that Ṣādiq should also have set a new direction in the creation of a distinctive theory of *khums*.

2.8 The origination and development of the Imami *khums*

Even before the distinctive Imami category of *khums* had been created, then, there were significant developments in tax theory underway in Ṣādiq’s day: the understanding of *zakāt*-collection as the prerogative of the Imam, as well as experimentation with the categories of ‘gifts to the Imam’ and ‘the known duty.’ Thus, Ṣādiq must have been collecting money from his followers in various forms. The development of the theory of *khums*, then, took place against the backdrop of ongoing efforts to collect money, and justify this collection through recourse to the Qur’ān. However, the statements ascribed to Bāqir and Ṣādiq do not yet clearly attest to a fully-formed conceptualization of *khums* in its classical Imami form. In its classical formulation, *khums* is due, not only on booty, as in the Qur’ānic *ghanima* verse, but has been expanded to include treasure mines and pearls, and even further to cover the ongoing profits of trade, craft, agriculture, rent, gifts and alms received, inheritance and things in which *ḥarām* has been mixed with *ḥalāl*.⁷² This is not only distinctly different from the Sunni conception of *khums* as the fifth of the booty, but different from *khums* as it appears in the statements of the early Imami Imams, Bāqir and Ṣādiq.

⁷² See, for example, Abū al-Ṣalāḥ al-Ḥalabī, *al-Kāfi fī al-fiqh*, edited by Riḍā al-Ustādī (Isfahan: Maktabat al-imām amīr al-mu’minīn ‘Alī, 1403 [1982-3]), 170.

Before I commence with a close analysis of the explicit statements of the Imams regarding *khums*, then, it is necessary to propose a framework within which the origination of a radically distinctive Imami theory of *khums* might have been generated. As we have seen, in the context of general Sunni and Zaydi ambivalence and hostility to the Umayyads, there is nothing especially remarkable about Bāqir and Ṣādiq's stance regarding the illicitness of giving *zakāt* to the caliphal government. The great innovation was to be the separation of *khums* as a formally independent tax category designed to provide the family of the Prophet, in particular the Shi'ī Imams, with their own rights to provision within the overall system of Islamic taxation. If this was indeed an innovation, how can it have been possible to originate it given the firmly established precedents? If people were regularly paying *zakāt* and the fifth of *ghanīma* to representatives of the caliphal government, then it would seem to be not merely idealistic or impractical, but utterly impossible to institute a conception of *khums* that so clearly conflicted with established practice. Instead, we must assume that legal precedents (both Sunni and Shi'ī) were generated in response to a mutation or breakdown in the established system. Mālik's discussion of whether to pay *zakāt* again if it was originally seized by an unjust Imam is suggestive here, for the context given for this legal case is the sudden conquest and then defeat of a Khārijite force.⁷³ As such, the both Sunni and Shi'ī legal systems developed innovative scriptural justifications, both to respond to circumstances, and to increasingly strive for a more streamlined ideal system, which must have made significant departures from both Umayyad practice and theory, and the less-theoretically developed statements of the Qur'ān. In this way, the Shi'ī conceptualization of *khums* occurred during a time when the legal system as a whole

⁷³ See 'Abd al-Salām ibn Sa'īd Sahnūn, *al-Mudawwana al-Kubrā* (Cairo: Ṭab'at al-sa'āda, 1906?), 1:285.

was fluid; part of the renegotiations occurring between scholars and power during the transition between dynasties.

Before the time of Bāqir and Ṣādiq, there a number of distinct categories of taxation that featured the proportion of a fifth, which, as we shall see, served as the raw materials which formed the basis of the classical Imami category of the *khums*:

1. War booty (*ghanīma/maghānim*), of which a fifth was due to the Prophet or Imam.
2. A subcategory of *ghanīma*; discovered wealth, analogically associated with war booty, which included buried treasure and the mineral produce of mines and the sea (pearls and amber), and was levied at the rate of a fifth, like booty.
3. ‘*Anfāl*’ lands (not to be confused with the Qur’ānic use of *anfāl*, which appears to be near-synonymous with *ghanīma*), the lands claimed by the Prophet to be worked by their original owners and taxed at the rate of a fifth of their harvests. These lands were considered the personal usufruct of the Prophet, and the birthright of Fāṭima, especially the lands of Fadak, which the Shi‘a believed to have been misappropriated by the early caliphs.

Eventually, the Imami theory of *khums* was developed through the association of these initially distinct categories which happened all to be levied at the rate of a fifth, which were reserved for the use of the Imam, in contrast with *zakāt*, which the Imam could administer, but not use for himself. *Anfāl* were formally distinct from the *khums*, but they often came to be dealt together by jurists as the revenue due to the Imam. Once an association was drawn between these categories, it set the stage for the classical Imami taxation theory.

It must be emphasized that even the Imams Bāqir and Ṣādiq do not articulate a clearly defined category of *khums* in their statements. Only in the Occultation-era legal compilations and

legal-theoretical texts do we see the category of *khums* clearly articulated. This is not to say that something like the classical Imami *khums* did not exist in the pre-Occultation period, but rather to emphasize that there was a gradual and fluid development from the time of Bāqir and Ṣādiq onwards, in which the establishment of the category of *khums* was contested at several points by members of the community. There were a couple of factors that made the *khums* tax-rate so particularly suggestive for the purposes of the first Imami theorists. First of all, the word ‘*khums*’ appears explicitly in the Qur’an (8:41), thereby lending it an immediate claim to represent a religiously significant essence. The mention of the *khums* as belonging to “God and the Prophet and the close relations” in the *ghanīma* verse in the Qur’ān provided a good textual basis for claiming something called *khums* as the special birthright of the Imams. Secondly, two associated subcategories applied to two distinct tax types to which the family of the Prophet had a particular claim: the fifth (*khums*) from *ghanīma* booty which had been traditionally set aside from the spoils of war and sent to the government in Mecca/Medina, and the lands inherited directly by the Prophet because they had been conquered “without the use of horses or mounts,”⁷⁴ which the Prophet had returned to be used by their original owners, with the provision that he took a fifth share of their produce.⁷⁵ Ultimately these are combined in classical Imami taxation theory and the word ‘*anfāl*’ comes to be used as an umbrella term to indicate all the different kinds of income due to the Imam.

As the Imams and the family of the Prophet in general were not permitted to receive *ṣadaqa/zakāt* monies, the *ghanīma* and ‘*anfāl*’ lands represented a potentially important source of legitimate claims upon canonical Islamic sources of revenue, in opposition to the claims of an

⁷⁴ See below.

⁷⁵ See Laura Veccia Vaglieri, “Fadak,” *EI2*.

illegitimate caliphal state. Initially it is likely that these claims were made mainly in the name of the family of the Prophet, and then only later gradually crystallized around the name of the Imam as a subtle means of opposing the Umayyads without a Zaydi-style military uprising that would pose a direct threat to the state.

Thus far, at least, the early Imami, or more properly proto-Imami theory of these two types of *khums* does not stray far from Umayyad or proto-Sunni and Zaydi categories. The real innovation was to be the reclassification of *ghanīma* as referring not only to a one-off discovery tax or windfall tax, but to ongoing taxation of regular income of certain types. However, as we shall see below, there is no evidence for this in the statements of Bāqir, and it cannot be attributed to Ṣādiq, though some of his hadith are suggestive of this.

2.8.1 Bāqir’s traditions on *khums*

There is little among Bāqir’s traditions, which, by itself, suggests the existence of a distinctive Imami *khums*. Instead the early compilers of legal hadith, in particular here Kulaynī, have deftly assembled statements to outline the later, conflated category. It is very likely that Kulaynī’s arrangement of these hadiths reflects early arrangements, perhaps even reflecting the Imams’ own concerns to bracket various categories of revenue together, but to go this far would be speculation. Instead of following the suggestion of Kulaynī’s arrangement, taken on their own terms, Bāqir’s statements do not refer to the classical Imami *khums*, but rather deal with its individual components. Just a single tradition from Bāqir is cited to refer to the fifth of the produce of mines, but nothing indicates that this is a category to be treated as part of a larger category of *khums* which includes daily income, and it might just as easily be understood as harmonizing with the Sunni conception of *ghanīma*: “Bāqir said: “As for the mines of ...

metal... well, a fifth is due upon them.”⁷⁶ In the later Imami legal compilations, this statement is used to support the classical Imami theory of *khums*, but in fact this does not diverge from Sunni theory.

As for the question of booty, again, Bāqir does not seem to have made any statements that represent a distinctive break. Several traditions ascribed to Bāqir displays a concern to clarify the question of the spoils of war, asserting that these should rightfully go to the family of the Prophet:

عن محمد بن مسلم عن أبي جعفر عليه السلام في قول الله تعالى : " واعلموا أنما غنمتم من شيء فإن لله خمسه و للرسول ولذي القربى " قال : هم قرابة رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله والخمس لله وللرسول ولنا .

Muḥammad b. Muslim reported from Abū Ja‘far [al-Bāqir] (AS) the words of God (T), “And known that whatever you take in booty, a fifth of it is for God, and the Prophet and the close relations (*dhū al-qurbā*).” [The Imam] said, “They are the close relations⁷⁷ of God’s Prophet (SAAA), and the fifth (*khums*) is for God and for the Prophet and for us.”⁷⁸

This statement refers again to Qur’ān 8:41, and the division of booty. There is no indication here that the Imam is speaking about *khums* in the later, wider sense. The assertion is that the fifth of the booty is for “us,” which later would have been taken to be the line of Imami Imams, but, here, could equally refer to the family of the Prophet as a whole, to distribute as they see fit, according to the precedent of the Prophet. This would potentially be a claim on behalf of the

⁷⁶ Kulayni, *Kāfī*, 1:544.

⁷⁷ See Lane, “*qarābatun* is correctly applicable to one and to a pl. number, as being originally an inf. N.; so that one says, *huwa qarābatī* and *hum qarābatī*.” *Lexicon*, 2508.

⁷⁸ Kulayni, *Kāfī*, 1:539.

‘Alids as a whole, or perhaps upon the head of the house, including Zaydi-style claimants to spiritual and temporal authority.

Other statements of Bāqir also emphasize the fifth of the spoils, for example one report in which Bāqir defines *khums* as the spoils taken when fighting under the *shahāda*.⁷⁹ Also probably referring to the treatment of war booty is the clause that *khums* is taken only after the separation of provisions for particular needs: “Bāqir said, “*Khums* is after provision (*ma`ūna*)””⁸⁰ This statement does not diverge from the dominant understanding of *khums* as one-off spoils of war. After *khums* was reclassified to include income this reference to ‘provision’ took on a different meaning, which was probably not present at this stage.⁸¹

A tradition that might give an explanation for the meaning of *ma`ūna* in this context is reported by Zurāra b. A‘yan, a companion of both Bāqir and Ṣādiq,⁸² though here he appears to be advancing his own autonomous juristic opinion:

عن زرارة قال : الامام يجري وينفل ويعطي ما شاء قبل أن تقع السهام وقد قاتل رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله
بقوم لم يجعل لهم في الفئ نصيبا وإن شاء قسم ذلك بينهم.

Zurāra said: The Imam bestows, and gives booty, and gives what he wishes before the apportioning of the spoils comes into effect, and the Prophet (SAAA) had fought with a group of people to whom he did not give a portion of the booty (*fay`*), though if he had wished, he would have divided it between them.⁸³

⁷⁹ Kulayni, *Kāfī*, 1:545.

⁸⁰ Kulayni, *Kāfī*, 1:545.

⁸¹ Once *khums* includes income, *ma`ūna* comes to refer to household necessities, thus *khums* comes to be understood as a tax on surplus income, rather than total income.

⁸² For the biography of Zurāra b. A‘yan, based on Najāshī and Kashshī, see Sachedina, *Messianism* 212-3, n77 and *The Just Ruler (al-sultān al-adīl) in Shī‘ite Islam: the Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 42.

⁸³ Kulayni, *Kāfī*, 1:544.

In this statement, then, the Prophet is seen as having divided the spoils according to canonical categories, but only after he had used his prerogative to make discretionary gifts, and even after this, he was not bound by the categories, and could exclude a group. Again, this speaks to the ability of the Imam to collect and distribute revenues in a flexible way. It should be noted that this is not significantly distinct from Sunni categories, though in retrospect, later Imamis could read this as giving their Imam full control of the revenue from warfare, and related categories of revenue.

In all, then, the statements ascribed to Bāqir suggest an interest in defining the booty, and the *anfāl* lands in such a way as to emphasize the claims of the family of the Prophet. It is unclear whether these are made on his own behalf, or on the behalf of his fellow ‘Alids in general.

2.8.2 Ṣādiq’s traditions on *khums*

Bearing in mind Ṣādiq’s statements on *zakāt* and his experimental development of alternative categories of revenue, when we read the statements ascribed to Ṣādiq we do see a clear progression towards the Imami theory of *khums*, including a move away from emphasis on the family of the prophet, and towards emphasis on the person of the Imam himself. Ṣādiq’s statements give more detail in the understanding of ‘*anfāl*’ lands than we see in Bāqir. One such tradition provides the standard juristic definition of ‘*anfāl*’ lands:

عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال : الأنفال ما لم يوجف عليه بخيل ولا ركاب ، أو قوم صالحوا ، أو قوم أعطوا بأيديهم ، وكل أرض خربة وبطن الأودية فهو لرسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وهو للامام من بعده يضعه حيث يشاء .

Abū ‘Abd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] said: the *anfāl* [are the lands] that have been cleared without horse or mount, or a group of people who have made a peace treaty, or a people who gave

with their hands, and every waste land and the bottoms of valleys, they belong to God's Prophet (SAAA) and the Imam after him: he disposes of it as he wishes."⁸⁴

Another tradition says *anfāl* includes property of a man who dies without heir,⁸⁵ which we might see as being in keeping with the logic of 'anfāl' lands as 'empty lands' without an owner. Instead, these traditions defining 'anfāl' lands are in keeping with the contemporary juristic systematizations, and also probably reflect prior Umayyad theory and practice.

Another tradition states, "[Ṣādiq] said: The *anfāl* and the choicest pick of the booty (*ṣafw al-māl*) are for the Imam."⁸⁶ Thus the Imam is explicitly emphasized, suggesting that Ṣādiq was concerned with clarifying those revenues which can be set apart exclusively for the use of the Imam, taking together the two categories of the 'anfāl' lands and the choice pick of the movable booty (*ṣafw al-māl*). This statement reinforces the idea of the fifth of the booty being divided only after certain discretionary allotments have been made – which again seems to refer to the idea of *khums* being taken "after provision (*ma'ūna*)", as we have seen above in the statements of Bāqir. A great difference is made to the interpretation of these statements according to whether we understand the Imam in this case to refer to the Shi'i Imam, or merely the Caliph. Clearly the one is derived from the other. Shi'i and Sunni understandings of Imamate and the prerogatives of the Imam are derived from the same set of precedents.

In terms of explicit references to the word *khums*, Ṣādiq is asked about the revenue of mines and the mineral wealth of the sea, and he merely answers "one fifth," in keeping with the

⁸⁴ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 539.

⁸⁵ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:546.

⁸⁶ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:546; 1:186.

widespread understanding of *ghanīma* as extending beyond just war booty to other types of discovery and windfall profits.⁸⁷

Ṣādiq, does, however make innovative statements on *khums*. Ṣādiq’s understanding of the function of *khums* is reflected in the following statement: “*Khums* purifies their births for them.”⁸⁸ This statement clearly brings *khums* in line with the purificatory ritual function of *zakāt*, bringing it out from the narrow understanding of the fifth of the booty (*khums al-ghanīma*), into its own category with its own ritual function. Was this shift problematic? It is *zakāt* which has a purificatory function in the Qur’ān.⁸⁹ The *ghanīma* verses in the Qur’ān do not suggest a purificatory role for the *khums* of *ghanīma* booty, but rather it appears merely to be the earthly reward for the victors of a righteous battle.⁹⁰ In stating that *khums* is to purify the births of the believers, then, the category of *khums* has appropriated some of the functions of *zakāt*, thus introducing a conflictual element into the system of Islamic ritual as two categories are contesting the same purificatory function.

Why was the separation of a distinct category of *khums* necessary at the time of Ṣādiq? Despite the efforts of Ṣādiq to establish his rights to the collection of *zakāt* and other related categories like ‘the known duty,’ and ‘gifts to the Imam,’ he was limited in his ability to use his discretion regarding those funds, because as a member of *ahl al-bayt*, he was not allowed to take them for himself, but only to oversee their redistribution. Ṣādiq had a concern to establish a source of revenue for the Imam and the *ahl al-bayt* that would be an alternative to *zakāt*. This concern is reflected in the following statement:

⁸⁷ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:546; 1:548.

⁸⁸ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:546.

⁸⁹ As well as, of course other entirely distinct ritual practices such as ablution.

⁹⁰ Q 8:69.

وسأل زكريا بن مالك الجعفي أبا عبد الله عليه السلام عن قول الله عز وجل " واعلموا أنما غنمتم من شيء فأن لله
 خمسه وللرسول ولذي القربى واليتامى والمساكين وابن السبيل " قال : أما خمس الله فللرسول يضعه في سبيل الله
 ، وأما خمس الرسول صلى الله عليه وآله فلا قاربه وخمس ذي القربى فهم أقرباؤه ، واليتامى يتامى أهل بيته ،
 فجعل هذه الأربعة الأسهم فيهم وأما المساكين وأبناء السبيل فقد عرفت أنا لا نأكل الصدقة ولا تحل لنا فهي
 للمساكين وأبناء السبيل

And Zakariyyā b. Mālik asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] about ... [the *ghanīma* verse, Q
 8:41]: He said, “As for God’s *khums*, it is for the Prophet to dispose of it in God’s path,
 and as for the Prophet’s *khums* it is for his relations (*aqārib*). As for the *khums* of the
 close relations (*dhū al-qurbā*) well, they are his close relations, and the orphans are the
 orphans of his family (*ahl baytihi*) and he gave these four portions to them, and as for the
 wretched (*masākīn*) and the wayfarers, well, you know that we do not consume *ṣadaqa*,
 and it is not licit for us, but it is for the wretched and the wayfarers.”⁹¹

This implies then, that the entirety of the *khums* is for the relations of the Prophet, and even
 though the wretched and the wayfarers are mentioned in the verse, because they are entitled to
zakāt/ṣadaqa, Ṣādiq downplays their claims on the *khums*.⁹² Notably there is no mention of the
 Imam himself, but only *ahl al-bayt*, probably thus related to earlier formulations emphasizing the
 lineage of ‘Alī as a corporate whole, from whom the Imami Imams had not yet been clearly
 separated.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibn Bābūya, *Faqīh*, 2:42.

⁹² Interestingly, this conflicts with later juristic rulings that suggest that the wretched and the wayfarers are
 subcategories of the *dhū qurbā* – that is to say, the needy amongst *sayyids*. See Calder, “*Khums*,” 39.

⁹³ This would fit in with what we know about broad ‘Alid approval of various revolts like that of Zayd b. ‘Alī and
 al-Nafs al-Zakiyya (see Crone, *God’s Rule*, 114) which would become problematic for later sectarians attempting to
 establish clean sectarian narratives of the messy past.

In another tradition, even greater emphasis is placed on the need for a distinct category of revenue to be set apart for the family of the Prophet:

وقال الصادق عليه السلام : إن الله لا إله إلا هو لما حرم علينا الصدقة أنزل لنا الخمس ، فالصدقة علينا حرام ،
والخمس لنا فريضة ، والكرامة لنا حلال.

Ṣādiq said: “God (there is no god but him), when he forbade *ṣadaqa* for us, he sent down to us the *khums*. So the *ṣadaqa* is forbidden (*ḥarām*) to us, and the *khums* is obligatory (*farīda*) for us, and generosity [gift-giving] to us is permitted (*ḥalāl*).”⁹⁴

In this statement, we see *khums* as a replacement of *zakāt* as revenue for the family of the Prophet. Here a distinctive ‘Alid-centric view of *khums* emerges as distinct from the Sunni conception in which *khums* appears as more or less comparable to *zakāt*, though being levied at a different rate, and having slightly different rules regarding distribution.⁹⁵ While this statement does not alter the common understanding that *khums* refers to the fifth of the booty, it is seen in the light of an attempt to define clearly a distinctive set of revenues that are the legitimate prerogative of the family of the Prophet. Rather than being integrated into the *zakāt* system, as appears in the Sunni discussions, *khums* is being set apart, and rather integrated into other revenues that are exclusively for the family of the Prophet, here referred to as ‘generosity’ (*karāma*), presumably referring to the gifts to the Imam mentioned elsewhere. This suggests that an increasing focus on the family of the Prophet, and probably the Imams in particular as the center of a salvific community was being established by the time this tradition was first circulated. The assertion that *khums* is a religious obligation – *farīda* – again seems to place it as

⁹⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Faqīh*, 2: 41.

⁹⁵ For example, it is noted that *khums* is *fay*, and thereby dissimilar from *zakāt* in that it can be given to rich and poor alike. Saḥnūn, *al-Mudawwana*, 1:300-2. See also 1:287-8. Kulaynī, on the other hand, sees the *khums* taken from the mines and the like as being part of the category of *anfāl*; the empty lands belonging to the Imam.

a parallel category of individual piety that suggests a very different context from the Qurānic *khums* of the *ghanīma* booty, with its context of military command and division of the spoils after a battle.

The greatest innovation that we must trace to around the time of Ṣādiq, or perhaps to the time of his son, Kāzīm, is the idea that *ghanīma* does not merely refer to war booty, but also to the ongoing profits of various kinds of economic activity. The development of this idea seems to be poised between the Imamates of Ṣādiq and Kāzīm. Returning to a report we mentioned above, Ṣādiq mentions *khums* in relation to his father’s practice of allowing dispensations to pay *zakāt*. I will quote this report again, this time in full, in order to discuss the question of *khums* raised here:

محمد بن يحيى ، عن أحمد بن محمد ، عن محمد بن سنان ، عن عبد الصمد بن بشير عن حكيم مؤذن [1] بن عيسى قال : سألت أبا عبد الله عليه السلام عن قول الله تعالى : " و اعلموا أنما غنمتم من شيء فأن لله خمسه وللرسول ولذي القربى " فقال أبو عبد الله عليه السلام بمرفقيه على ركبتيه ثم أشار بيده ، ثم قال : هي والله الإفاضة يوما بيوم إلا أن أبا جعل شيعته في حل ليزكوا .

“I asked Abū ‘Abd Allāh [Ṣādiq] about God’s words: “And know that whatever you take in booty, a fifth of it is for God and for his Prophet and for the close relations (*dhī al-qurbā*).” And Abū ‘Abd Allāh spoke, with his elbows on his knees, then pointed with his hand then he said, “[*Ghanīma*] is, by God, profit from day to day (*al-ifāda yawman bi-yawmin*), except that my father gave his Shi‘a a dispensation to pay *zakāt* (*abī ja ‘ala shī‘atahu fī ḥillin an yuzakkū*).”⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Kulayni, *Kāfī*, 1:544.

This “profit from day to day” suggests something other than the one-off windfall profit of war-booty suggested in this verse of the Qur’ān, and indeed in the whole sura “*al-anfāl*” from which it comes, but seems to be defining *khums* as a wider conception of ongoing income. This is very significant, as the Occultation-era jurists eventually described *khums* as a broadly defined income tax on the profits of not just war, but also trade, agriculture and craft.⁹⁷ While Ṣādiq’s statement does not suggest such a clear and expansive category, it does at least suggest that it has moved beyond the once-off division of spoils towards regular contributions from income.

The second key point of interest in this statement is the mention of Bāqir’s dispensation allowing his followers to pay *zakāt*. Though this passage is difficult to interpret it seems to be explicitly addressing the problem created by a tension between the paying of *khums* and the paying of *zakāt* which would be inevitable whenever *khums* was introduced as a tax category that overlapped with the kinds of income that had previously fallen under the rubric of *zakāt*. If this hadith does indeed indicate that *khums* was now conceived of as an income tax, then it does indeed suggest that *zakāt* payments on income and *khums* payments on income were now overlapping, and might lead to Imamis having to pay a double tax on the same goods or activities.

In addition, it seems that there might have been some need to justify earlier practice, while establishing the new norm. Thus, Ṣādiq reinterprets Bāqir’s attitude that paying *zakāt* to the Caliphs is legitimate, describing it instead as a temporary dispensation, rather than an eternal norm, though it is very likely that at the time of Bāqir, the payment of *zakāt* was, in fact,

⁹⁷ This interpretation relies on a shift of emphasis from the noun ‘booty’ (*ghanīma* or *maghānim*), to the verb ‘what you earn’ (*ghanimtum*), which implies ongoing activity. See Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfi*, edited by ‘Alī ‘Āshūr (Beirut: *Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘arabī* 1421 AH/ 2000 CE) 7:407-8, for the post-Occultation interpretation of this passage, in which *ifāda* is understood to refer to the profits of trade, agriculture and crafts. See also a hadith from an unnamed Imam, probably a later Imam such as ‘Alī al-Hādī, given the shortness of the *isnād*, in which *ifāda* is stated to include the profits of agriculture and trade. Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 1: 545.

undertaken by Shi‘a in a similar fashion to the majority of the Muslims. It is only at the time of Ṣādiq, then, that *zakāt* payment to the Caliphs was increasingly regarded as impermissible. At the same time, we see the attempt to establish embryonic category of *khums* to the Imams as an alternative to *zakāt* to the Caliphs, though this hadith clearly displays some confusion about whether *khums* and *zakāt* are basically the same category, or different.

2.8.3 *Khums* theory under Kāzīm⁹⁸

With Mūsā al-Kāzīm, the theorization of *khums* takes a great leap towards what we recognize as the classical Imami position on *khums*. We see, for the first time an explicit conflation of two of the major component categories of Imami *khums*:

عن العبد الصالح عليه السلام قال : الخمس من خمسة أشياء من الغنائم والغوص ومن الكنوز ومن المعادن والملاحة يؤخذ من كل هذه الصنوف الخمس ، فيجعل لمن جعله الله تعالى له ويقسم الأربعة الأخماس بين من قاتل عليه وولي ذلك ويقسم بينهم الخمس على ستة أسهم سهم لله وسهم لرسول الله وسهم لذوي القربى وسهم لليتامى وسهم للمساكين وسهم لأبناء السبيل . فسهم الله وسهم رسول الله لاولي الامر من بعد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وراثه فله ثلاثة أسهم : سهمان وراثه وسهم مقسوم له من الله وله نصف الخمس كمالا ونصف الخمس الباقي بين أهل بيته ، فسهم لیتاماهم وسهم لمساكينهم وسهم لأبناء سبيلهم يقسم بينهم على الكتاب والسنة ما يستغنون به في سنتهم ، فإن فضل عنهم شئ ، فهو للوالي وإن عجز أو نقص عن استغنائهم كان على الوالي أن ينفق من عنده بقدر ما يستغنون به في سنتهم ، فإن فضل عنهم شئ فهو للوالي وإن عجز أو نقص عن استغنائهم كان على الوالي أن ينفق من عنده بقدر ما يستغنون به وإنما صار عليه أن يمونهم لان له ما فضل عنهم .

⁹⁸There is a certain difficulty over distinguishing Kāzīm and Riḍā, due to the fact that they both have the same *kunya*, Abū al-Ḥasan. In general, however, where there is doubt about which Abū al-Ḥasan is meant, we can assumed it to be Kāzīm, due to the fact that Riḍā often goes by the moniker Abū al-Ḥasan II, suggesting that Kāzīm was regarded as the default.

The righteous servant [Kāzīm] (AS)⁹⁹ said: The *khums* is taken from five things: from booty (*ghanā'im*), and pearl-diving, treasure, mines, and salt-flats (*mallāḥa*). The *khums* is taken from all of those categories (*ṣunūf*), and donated to those to whom God (T) donated them, and divided into four fifths between those who fought for them or the owner of that property. The remaining fifth is divided between them into the six portions which God apportioned: a portion for the Prophet of God, and a portion for the close relations, and a portion for the orphans, and a portion for the wretched, and a portion for the wayfarers. And God's portion and the Prophet's portion are for the holders of authority (*ūlī al-amr*) after God's Prophet (SAAA) [i.e. the Imam] as an inheritance. And that has three portions: two portions of inheritance, and a portion divided for him from God. And half of that fifth is just for him, and the half of the fifth, between the people of his house (*ahl baytihi*): a portion for the orphans amongst them, a portion for the wretched amongst them, a portion for the wayfarers amongst them, divided according to the Book and the precedents (*sunna*), meeting their needs according to their habits (*sunna*). And if anything is left over from them, then that is for the Imam (*al-walī*), and if it is imperfect or insufficient for their needs, it is incumbent upon the Imam to pay from his own wealth according to what meets their needs. But it is only necessary for him to provide sustenance for them, because he has a surplus for them.”¹⁰⁰

Here then, for the first time, is a comprehensive, systematic overview of the Imami *khums*.

Kāzīm clarifies the ‘five things’ which make up *khums*, and their proper recipients. Crucially,

Kāzīm explicitly arrogates the entirety of the *khums* to the family of the Prophet, apparently for

⁹⁹ The righteous servant (*al-'abd al-ṣāliḥ*) is a standard epithet for Kāzīm. See Etan Kohlberg, “Mūsā al-Kāzīm,” *EI2*.

¹⁰⁰ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 539-40.

the first time. Thus, three shares out of six (i.e. a half) of the *khums* go to the Imam alone, with the other three shares going to orphans wretched and wayfarers *of the family of the Prophet*. This then adjusts the statement of Ṣādiq in which he implicitly suggests that the wretched, the orphans and the wayfarers do not need the *khums* because they may receive *ṣadaqa/zakāt*. Here, instead, these needy are allowed their share of the *khums*, but only if they are drawn from the ranks of *ahl al-bayt*.

The statement clarifies ambiguity, providing a fairly comprehensive overview to guide the collection and distribution of *khums*. In addition, it appears to be directed only to the Imami conception of the Imam, which fits with our understanding of Kāzīm as a more revolutionary figure than his father.¹⁰¹ Again, however, we should note that the solutions Kāzīm arrives at here are not identical to the classical *khums* theory as developed in the Fifth/Eleventh century.¹⁰² It mentions both the rights of the Imam to the *khums* revenues, but also his obligations, at least as far as the family of the Prophet is concerned.

وسئل أبو الحسن عليه السلام " عن الرجل يأخذ منه هؤلاء زكاة ماله أو خمس غنيمته ، أو خمس ما يخرج له من المعادن أيحسب ذلك له في زكاته وخمسه ؟ فقال : نعم

Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Kāzīm]¹⁰³ was asked about a man from whom they [i.e. illegitimate rulers, perhaps the ‘Abbasids] took the *zakāt* of his property or the fifth of his booty (*khums ghanīmatihī*) or the fifth from the mines, then is that counted amongst his *zakāt* and his *khums*? And [the Imam] said, “Yes.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ For example Kāzīm appears to have supported the uprising of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, see Crone, *God’s Rule*, 114.

¹⁰² See Calder, which mentions divergences between hadith and the classical theory.

¹⁰³ ‘Alī al-Riḍā was also called Abū al-Ḥasan, though generally, if left unqualified, this name refers to the father, rather than the son.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Faqīh*, 2:43.

Again, here we see a question of the conflict with the revenues that the caliphal authorities were collecting. In particular, it suggests that there was a conflict that arose from the need to pay *zakāt* or *khums* to the coercive authority of the Caliphs, but also to meet the demands of the Imams. This appears to conflict with the more uncompromising statements of Ṣādiq regarding the illicitness of paying *zakāt* to caliphal authorities.

Within the context of his ongoing assertion of the Imam's rights to the revenue of his community, another intriguing hadith shows Kāzīm standing up for the traditional rights of *ahl al-bayt*, by accusing the Caliph Maḥdī for not restoring the rights of the family of the Prophet to the Fadak lands.¹⁰⁵ Thus, we see that Kāzīm continues to be upholding earlier traditions of a very public rhetoric of outrage over the misappropriation of the revenues that are the birthright of the *ahl-al bayt* in general. Perhaps this kind of very public rhetoric in support of the 'Alids is partly what got Kāzīm in trouble with the Caliphs, leading to his imprisonment later under Hārūn al-Rashīd.¹⁰⁶

The statements from Kāzīm, then, show a clear development of both *khums*, as part of a defense of the rights of the *ahl al-bayt* as a whole to a distinct portion of the revenue generated by the Muslims. While these statements are few and we might be tempted to discard these hadith as ahistorical, the gradual development of *khums* theory indicated by the hadith is corroborated by other sources. We know from the biographical dictionaries and heresiographies that Kāzīm was, indeed, responsible for developing the revenues of his community. This is clear from the fact that, the first clear references to a network of *wakīls* occur in conjunction with his

¹⁰⁵ The lands of Fadak were transferred into and away from the control of the 'Alids over the course of successive Imams throughout the Umayyad and 'Abbasid periods. See Laura Veccia Vaglieri, "Fadak," *EI2*.

¹⁰⁶ Etan Kohlberg, "Mūsā al-Kāzīm," *EI2*.

Imamate.¹⁰⁷ Thus, by the time of Kāzīm’s death we understand that the office of *wakīl* had developed enough autonomous prestige and clout to be able to challenge the succession of the Eighth Imam, Riḍā. One of the ways that the rejection of Riḍā’s Imamate was expressed was when the *wakīls* who opposed him refused to send the canonical taxes to the new Imam. They believed that Kāzīm, the Seventh Imam was in occultation, and the canonical taxes belonged to him alone, on his return.¹⁰⁸ The collection of the canonical taxes put the *wakīls* of Kāzīm in a position to assert an independent power-base from which to challenge the new candidate for the Imamate. The activities of these *wakīls* must be seen in terms of a taxation theory that was now sufficiently developed to allow the collection of canonical taxes as a legitimate activity now central to the definition of the Imami Imam, and important for his power base and his claim to continuing the tradition of his fathers. As such, taxation was by Kāzīm both a very practical matter and also one with important symbolic dimensions for the continuity of the community.

Kāzīm could not carry the centralization of revenue collection to its furthest extent and he explicitly alludes to the limitations of a centralized system:

عن محمد بن يزيد ، عن أبي الحسن الأول (عليه السلام) قال : من لم يستطع أن يصلنا فليصل فقراء شيعتنا
ومن لم يستطع أن يزور قبورنا فليزر قبور صلحاء إخواننا.

Muḥammad b. Yazīd reported that Abū al-Ḥasan the First [al-Kāzīm] (AS) said,

“Whoever cannot give gifts to us, let him give to the poor of our Shi‘a, and whoever cannot visit our tombs, let him visit the tombs of the good men of our brethren.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ In Kashshī, the earliest circumstance in which a *wakīl* is mentioned the succession dispute between the *qaṭ‘iyya* and the *wāqifa* following Kāzīm’s death.

¹⁰⁸ Buyyukkara, “Schism,” 85-6.

¹⁰⁹ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 59-60.

This statement suggests that in addition to the practical implementation of canonical tax-collection, and the affirmation of the ideal of Imamic collection, it was recognized that in many cases, the centralization of *zakāt* or *khums* collection was just not possible, but that the principle was nonetheless maintained, with dispensation granted according to what is practically possible. It is perhaps significant that this statement is ascribed to Kāzīm, as his long imprisonment by the ‘Abbasids would indeed have resulted in an inability to make direct payments to the Imam, just as, later, the house arrest of Imams Hādī and ‘Askarī lead to the development of a relatively autonomous group of *wakīls* who were sufficiently strong to continue their activities even without an Imam after the death of ‘Askarī in 260/874.

Thus, by the time of Kāzīm, the Imami canonical tax system was clearly being implemented on a fairly large scale. This gives us independent corroboration of our analysis of the hadith statements Ṣādiq, which indicate the attempt to create legitimate sources of revenue. Without the prior development of this tradition, the canonical tax-collection network could not have become so significant a marker of Imamic legitimacy by the time of Kāzīm. Thus by the time of Kāzīm we can assume the existence of a real, active network of *wakīls* implementing the theory of canonical tax-collection which set the Imami community upon an independent financial footing, maintaining a separate spiritual-financial economy which divided them from other sects. This network posed an implicit threat to the caliphal state, by building institutions that echoed and undermined the legitimacy of state taxation-collection institutions, on the basis of an oppositional theology.

The key innovations in the taxation-theory of Ṣādiq and Kāzīm's time, then, were twofold: firstly the development of a strand of thought that, in lieu of the prohibited *ṣadaqa/zakāt* revenues, created an area of taxation law dedicated to those revenues that were the exclusive

prerogative of the family of the Prophet. It is very possible that this was part of the wider Ḥashimite movement that arose in opposition to the Umayyads, though it came to have a particular meaning in the context of the quietist Imamate of Imamis after Kāẓim.

The second major innovation in the taxation theory of Ṣādiq and Kāẓim was the reinterpretation of the fifth (*khums*) of the *ghanīma* from being a one-off windfall tax on booty to a tax on ongoing income. From this moment on, and in combination with a more widespread the Umayyad-era resistance to the caliphal state, Imamis would have a whole new distinctive area of tax-theory, based on Qur'ānic exegesis and a distinctive understanding of the Imamic authority of a non-governing religious leader. The significance of this moment in Imami institutional development becomes more significant when we consider the imprisonment of Kāẓim. Not only was the canonical tax-collection becoming expanded in both theory and in its implementation, but Kāẓim was deemed a sufficient threat for the Caliph to imprison him. In some accounts, it is Kāẓim's collection of funds that led to his imprisonment,¹¹⁰ and no wonder, for the creation of a shadow fiscal apparatus must have implied resistance, if not confrontation to the state. It is telling that the *khums* hadith carry Kāẓim's challenge to the Caliph over the question of Fadak: an implicit challenge to the Caliph's legitimacy as successor to the Prophet's legacy, voiced publicly, was unlikely to win caliphal approval.

2.8.4 Riḍā: crisis of succession and resistance from his followers

Following the death, in an 'Abbasid prison, of Mūsā al-Kāẓim in 183/799, the accession to the Imamate by the Eighth Imam, 'Alī al-Riḍā, was hotly contested by many in the Imami community. This is a clear indication that there was, by now, a stable understanding of the Imamate as a hereditary position, embedded within a number of institutions that extended the

¹¹⁰ Etan Kohlberg, "Mūsā al-Kāẓim," *EI2*.

Imam's influence far out to the community of his followers. Not least of these was the network of *wakīls* who collected and redistributed his canonical taxes. The first mention of a *wakīl* in Kashshī's biographical dictionary of the Shi'ī notables is in references to the *wakīls* who protested against the Imamate of Riḍā, withholding the canonical taxes from him, and instead upheld the 'wāqifi' idea that succession to the Imamate had suspended, and Kāẓim had gone into Occultation, to return again. In a clear indication that our legal hadith are, indeed, authentically datable to the period of the Imams they are ascribed to, the *khums* theory reflects the turmoil of Riḍā's day. The key element that is distinctive in the statements on *khums* ascribed to Riḍā is a spate of requests for exemption from canonical taxes:

عن محمد بن زيد قال : قدم قوم من خراسان على أبي الحسن الرضا عليه السلام فسألوه أن يجعلهم في حل من الخمس ، فقال : ما أمحل هذا تمحضونا بالمودة بالسنتكم وتزورون عنا حقا جعله الله لنا وجعلنا له وهو الخمس لا نجعل ، لا نجعل ، لا نجعل لاحد منكم في حل .

Muḥammad b. Zayd said: A group of people came from Khurāsān to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā (AS) and they asked him to give them a dispensation from the *khums* (*an yaj`aluhum fī ḥillin min al-khums*). [The Imam] said, "... We will not, we will not, we will not grant any person amongst you a dispensation."¹¹¹

In this account, then, a community from the east comes to the Imam, asking for a dispensation from *khums*, and they are strongly rebuffed with the suggestion that there are no circumstances in which a dispensation from *khums* is possible. Clearly this must be seen in the context of the problems posed by the *wāqifa* and the challenge they presented to the legitimacy of the new

¹¹¹ Kulayni, *Kāfī*, 1:548.

candidate for Imamate, and his canonical tax-collection mechanism as a result. Another tradition mentions similar requests from people coming from the east:

محمد بن زيد الطبري قال : كتب رجل من تجار فارس من بعض موالي أبي الحسن الرضا عليه السلام يسأله الاذن في الخمس فكتب إليه . بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم... لا يحل¹¹² مال إلا من وجه أحله الله وإن الخمس عوننا على ديننا وعلى عيالاتنا وعلى موالينا ، وما نبذله ونشتري من أعراضنا ممن نخاف سطوته ، فلا تزووه عنا ولا تحرموا أنفسكم دعاءنا ما قدرتم عليه ، فإن إخراجة مفتاح رزقكم وتمحيص ذنوبكم...

Muḥammad b. Ziyād al-Ṭabarī said: A man from the merchants of Fārs from amongst the *mawālī* of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā (AS) asked him permission regarding *khums*, and [the Imam] wrote back to him:

“In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate... Money is not licit except to the extent to which God has made it licit. Indeed *khums* is our aid in our religion, for our dependents and our followers (*mawālī*). We do not waste it nor use it to buy goods for ourselves due to what we fear of his severity, so do not conceal it (*tazwūhu*) from us, and do exclude yourselves from our prayers when you are capable of paying it. Indeed, paying [the *khums*] is the key to sustenance for yourselves, and the purification of your sins...”¹¹³

Again, the Imam rejects the request for a dispensation from *khums*, in this case providing a broader religious justifications for it, including both purification, and also as a means to future worldly sustenance (*rizq*).

Why do we see this sudden clumping of requests for dispensation from the *khums* linked to the name of al-Riḍā in the legal sources? It clearly suggests that *khums* had indeed been levied

¹¹² Here I read “يحل” instead of “يخل”.

¹¹³ Kulayni, *Kāfi*, 1:547-8.

on a wide scale during the Imamate of Kāzīm – among communities as far as Khurāsān – but that there was a relapse following his death. This relapse fits in with the historical narratives and heresiographical sources that note the problems with the succession to Kāzīm, and the large break-away group of the *wāqifa* who denied the Imamate of Riḍā, and withheld canonical taxes from him.¹¹⁴ The above hadith suggest that even the pro-Riḍā communities tried to gain dispensations from payment, suggesting that even after a couple of generations, the systematic collection of canonical taxes was insufficiently institutionalized. Riḍā however asserted continuity.

While Kāzīm appears to have been a charismatic innovator, establishing a parallel Shi‘i shadow fiscal economy, and publically standing up for the rights of the *ahl-al-bayt* to Fadak in the face of the Caliph, Riḍā's legitimacy was initially difficult to establish in the face of the *wāqifi* revolt. The requests for exemption may not necessarily have been made by *wāqifs*, but clearly it was a moment in which the burdens of the Imamic canonical taxes might have seen too much to bear when the legitimacy of the candidate for Imamate was not clearly proven. This attitude can be compared to what was to happen several generations later after the death of ‘Askarī, and the dispensation which Abū Ja‘far was forced to offer his community regarding the *khums*¹¹⁵ when faced with the impossibility of collecting the full complement of Imamic canonical taxes during the perplexity of the *ghayba* era. These requests for exemption may not have been insubordination, though at least in the first example, Riḍā certainly seems to have been exasperated by them. Instead it shows the pitfalls of the living word of the Imams which meant that what one Imam established could be reinterpreted and shifted by a later Imam,

¹¹⁴ Buyukkara, “Schism,” 85-95.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter 7.

through his living interpretation of divine text, and the interests of his community. In this case, it had the potential to work against the Imam, as his community could perhaps expect new position on Imamic-taxation to fit the new era.

Other than the question of dispensations, the statements of al-Riḍā on *khums* suggest a continued refinement of its nature and scope, including a specification of the relationship between *khums* and *zakāt*. In once case, for example, Riḍā is asked about *zakāt* on treasure, and he says, “*Zakāt* is not required on treasure, but rather *khums* is required on it.”¹¹⁶ Apparently there continued to be a confusion between the two categories, and perhaps a hostility to the idea of paying a double-tax on the same item that required explicit statement from the Imam.

2.8.5 Later Imams

Between Riḍā and the Occultation era, there is little addition to the theory of Imami *khums*. Refinements and clarifications continue, but no great alterations are evident. One thing that must be emphasized is that there appear to have been ongoing resistance from the community to the imposition of *khums*. The Ninth Imam, Jawād, like Riḍā, was asked to grant a dispensation from paying *khums*. Interestingly enough, in this case, Jawād agrees to grant a dispensation, but after the petitioner has left the room, he inveighs against him, suggesting that God will mark the non-payment of *khums* against his name on judgement day.¹¹⁷

Evidence of continued resistance and confusion about the right of the Imams to collect revenues from their community appears even as late as the Imamate of the Tenth Imam, Hādī. In one hadith, someone questions whether Hādī has the right to inherit the property and collect the dues of the previous Imam, assuming that on the death of Jawād, responsibilities lapsed. This

¹¹⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Faqīh*, 2:40.

¹¹⁷ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:548.

hadith, then suggests the ongoing need to assert the continuity of the *naṣṣ* Imamate and continuously to justify the centralized collection of dues from the community. In this light, we must draw the conclusion that even a century after the time of Bāqir, the identity and institutions of the Imami community are more precarious than we tend to assume, or otherwise how would it be possible that Hādi's right to Jawād's property could be contested? This report may center upon doubts about an individual case of succession from the ninth to the tenth Imam (though this was one of the smoother moments in succession in the Imami line), but it also undermines our assumptions of the strength and continuity of the institutions of the Imamate, suggesting that the centralizing efforts Imams were countered by the centrifugal forces of local self-determination.

2.9 Conclusion

In summary, the statements of the Imams suggest a development of Imami *khums* within the context of a broader attempt to define a set of revenue categories as the exclusive right of the family of the Prophet, who could not collect *zakāt*, and for the Imam in particular, as the idea of the *naṣṣ* Imamate of the Imami Imam gathered speed. The development of the category of *zakāt* itself was also an important part of this picture, for if the Imami Imam could collect and control *zakāt*, even if he could not legitimately use it for himself, this nonetheless would burnish his reputation as the ritual center of his community, while extending his patronage network.

The Imami taxation theory has similarities with both Sunni and Zaydi taxation theory, and, indeed all three underwent pivotal developments at a time of contestation of Umayyad authority. What remains a mystery is exactly why Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and Mūsā al-Kāẓim, in particular, took steps to develop theory and practice of collection of large amounts of funding. It seems likely that the origins of this phenomenon was the anti-caliphal *da'wa* which gave rise to a number of 'Alid revolts, but was disrupted by the most successful example of such a *da'wa*: the

‘Abbasid revolution? Even after the rise of the ‘Abbasids it appears that the community structures and legal theories put in place continued to bear fruit for the Imami community, producing a shadow fiscal system that implicitly, but not explicitly, rivalled the state.

At any rate, by the death of Mūsā al-Kāzīm in 183/799, the collection of canonical taxes from the community was developed enough for the agents to precipitate a crisis when the *wāqif* agents in Kufa withheld canonical taxes from the new Imam, Riḍā, who also faced a slew of requests for dispensation from paying *khums* (especially from members of the community in the east; Khurāsān and Fārs), suggesting again, that the centralized collection of *khums*, even from fairly far-flung adherents, had been consolidated by the beginning of the third/ninth century. However, ongoing challenges of the Imams’ collection of money suggest that this process of consolidation was never complete, so that by the death of the Eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī in 260/874, the ongoing collection of canonical taxes from the community was certainly not guaranteed. And indeed, in the following chapters we will further discuss the very real difficulties faced by the *wakīls* attempting to hold the community together in the Occultation era.

Chapter 3: The crucible of Occultation: the structure and dynamics of the Imami community

3.1 Overview

To understand the events that took place upon the death of the Eleventh Imam, we must understand the structure and dynamics of the Shi‘i community. As I argued in the introduction, the Imamate included both direct communications between the community and the Imam, and the symbolic representation of the Imam’s authority to the community, an authority which was interpreted as having different qualities by different hermeneutic sub-communities within the broad church of the Imami Shi‘a. The process of symbolization of the Imam, was controlled to some extent, mediated as it was through the sacred economy of the *wikāla* network. The need for such institutions of mediation was a function of the fact that the Imami Shi‘i community was, by the late third/ninth century, relatively far-flung, though probably thinly spread throughout the Muslim world.

It is important to emphasize, that rather than being purely a community of belief, the Imam community in this period was linked by ritual practice, by the circulation of material objects. Belief was an important requisite to the definition of community: belief in the Imamate of a particular Imam was foundational to the community identity. In this chapter, I aim to show the ways in which the Imam functioned as the center of a loosely-structured network. In spite the Imam’s symbolic centrality, does not operate in a purely top-down fashion, but rather the Imamate and the regions that acknowledge him are engaged in constant negotiations about fiscal issues, doctrinal issues, patronage and politics. The different elements within the Shi‘i community, the regional communities, the functionaries, servants and family of the Imams, all

participated in the creation of meaning, and the early Occultation period shows a process of negotiation between them to solve the Crisis in the Imamate.

It is important to recognize the complexity and inertia of the structures that we discuss in this chapter because it was these structures which remained after the Eleventh Imam's death in 260/874. Through the uneasy continuity of these institutions of Imamate – in particular the *wikāla* network whose agents mediated the presence of the Imams – the distant Shi'a were able to continue to feel the presence of the Imamate, even though there was no present Imam. The Imam's charisma was represented through the sacred economy of the *wikāla* network, and this allowed that the idea of the Hidden Imam could find root, and gain force for a community who were still experiencing the ongoing operation of the institutions of the Imamate.

3.2 The structure of the Imami community around the time of the Occultation

3.2.1 The geographical disposition of the community connected by the *wikāla*-network

We will now look briefly at the geographical spread and disposition of the Imami community in the aftermath of the death of the Eleventh Imam. A crucial report that helps us to locating key figures in the Imami community in the early *ghayba* era, is cited in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*. Ibn Bābūya cites a hadith narrated by a certain Muḥammad b. Abī 'Abd Allāh al-Kūfī, and transmitted by two generations of the Asadī family which was prominent in the era of the Envoys Abū Ja'far and Ibn Rawḥ: both Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī, a *wakīl* for Rayy, who was said to have succeeded to the authority of Ḥājiz the *wakīl*, and his son Abū 'Alī. In this hadith, Muḥammad al-Kūfī provides a list of those who saw the Twelfth Imam, split into those who saw the Imam from among the *wakīls*, and then from among named and unnamed members of the broader community. This gives us a sense of both where major centers of the Imami community were located, but also a sense for where support for the Occultation faction was based. The order

in which they are mentioned is also significant, in that it appears to work out from the center, via significant central communities, to more far-flung ones.

Table 3: *Wakīls* who saw the Imam, according to Muḥammad al-Kūfī¹

From	Name	Affiliation
Baghdad (5)	Al-‘Amrī [‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, or Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr]	First Envoy in Twelver tradition
	His son [Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān, Abū Ja‘far]	Second Envoy in Twelver tradition. Son of al-‘Amrī, above.
	Ḥājiz	Important <i>wakīl</i> of the early <i>nāḥiya</i> . Active in Baghdad and Samarra. Seems to deal with the east: Merv, Balkh. ⁱ Doubts surrounding his authority were countered by a rescript issued in the name of the Hidden Imam. ⁱⁱ
	Al-Bilālī	Prominent <i>wakīl</i> of Eleventh Imam. Became an opponent of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī.
	Al-‘Aṭṭār	This probably refers to ‘Alī b. Sulaymān b. Rashīd al-‘Aṭṭār al-Baghdādī, mentioned by Kashshī as being a keeper of a storehouse (<i>khazāna</i>) on behalf of the Eleventh Imam. ⁱⁱⁱ

¹ Based on al-Asadī’s narration, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442-3.

ⁱ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488.

ⁱⁱ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498-9.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 406-7. Given that this ‘Aṭṭār is listed among the *wakīls* from Baghdad, he should not be confused with the family of Qummī traditionalists which include Yaḥyā b. Muthannā, Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-‘Aṭṭār, and his son, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, who are prominent transmitters of hadith asserting the existence of the Hidden Imam (see Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al- Najāshī, *Rijāl*, (or *Asmā’ muṣannifāt al-shī‘a*), edited by Mūsā al-Shubayrī al-Zanjānī (Qumm: Mu’assisat al-nashr al-islāmī: 1407 H [1986 CE]), 353.)

Kufa (1)	Al-‘Āsimī	Transmitter of hadith highlighting Ḥājiz’s role in the <i>nāḥiya</i>
Ahwāz (1)	Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār	<i>Wakīl</i> for <i>Ahwāz</i> . Famously doubted the Occultation, and the Envoyship of Abū Ja‘far but was eventually won over. Son of a <i>wakīl</i>
Qumm (1)	Aḥmad b. Ishāq	Prominent early-Occultation regional <i>wakīl</i> , scholar and hadith transmitter. In the <i>thiqa</i> hadith he appears in favor of ‘Amrīs and <i>ghayba</i> . He appears as the Qummī delegate to Samarra to find the Imam. (See Chapter 5).
Hamadān (1)	Muḥammad b. Šāliḥ	
Rayy (2)	Al-Bassāmī	
	Al-Asadī	Probably the father or some other relation of Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Asadī, ^{iv} the <i>wakīl</i> at Rayy who succeeded Ḥājiz (see Chapter 5).
Ādharbayjān (1)	Al-Qāsim b. al-‘Alā’	Sent money from <i>waqf</i> of Eleventh Imam to <i>wikāla</i> . ^v <i>Wakīl</i> since time of al-Hādī, Tenth ^{vi} succeeded in post by his son Ḥasan. ^{vii}

^{iv} Seeing as Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī is in the *isnād* of this report, it would seem unlikely (though not impossible), that he should be one of the *wakīls* listed in it, suggesting that it is an Asadī of an earlier generation, though the location at Rayy suggests that it is probably of the same family of *wakīls*. As we will see, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī appears to have belonged to the second generation of *wakīls* in the Occultation era, based on his death date reported in the *rijāl* literature, see below, Chapter 5.

^v Hussain, *Occultation*, 124.

^{vi} Hussain, *Occultation*, 95.

^{vii} Hussain, *Occultation*, 124.

Nishapur (1)	Muḥammad b. Shādhān [b. Nu‘aym]	Mentioned in a rescript (<i>tawqī‘</i>) of Twelfth Imam as “a man of our Shi‘a” ^{viii} Related to Faḍl b. Shādhān the Nishapuri scholar
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It must be emphasized that this list reflects literary memory as much as it does historical activities. It clearly has been compiled from extant reports available to one of the transmitters, and quite possibly updated by later links in the chain. The people in this report appear in it by virtue of the fact that their names exist in hadith about the Occultation or have dealings with the Imam or the *nāḥiya*.¹ Nonetheless, it gives us a useful summary of knowledge about the Occultation drawn from some time in the early-mid fourth/tenth century, a generation or two before Ibn Bābūya wrote it down. Unless evidence exists to suggest otherwise, all of these named *wakīls* can be provisionally be assumed to be insiders to the Occultation-faction, by virtue of their reputation as people who are remembered as having sworn witness to the existence of the hidden Imam. However, various reports also show that the Occultation faction was split, and ‘Amrī leadership was contested. We will deal with these conflicts in detail later, in particular in Chapter 7, but for our understanding of the structures of the *wikāla*-network of this time, it is important to acknowledge the existence of conflicts which might take the form of ideological differences, or struggles for control of resources or influence. The *wakīls* (especially the

^{viii} Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483-5.

¹The literary nature of this list is clearly apparent in the list of the non-*wakīls* who saw the Imam. These are a mixture of prominent Imami figures and unknown figures, including many who appear to be merely stock characters culled from miracle stories, and can only be recognized by reference to the story in which they appear – such as the man with the pebbles (*ṣāhib al-ḥasāt*) mentioned in the table below, which appears to correspond to a hadith in which the Imam turns pebbles into gold, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 444-5. In addition, the names of many of the less well known figures might well have suffered gradual orthographic degradation over the years of transmission, so it is hard to be sure that these are indeed real names.

Baghdadi *wakīls*) listed in this report become focal points for strong support of, or strong opposition to the Occultation faction lead by the ‘Amrīs.

Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s report also includes a list of non-*wakīls* who saw the Imam:

Table 4: Non-*wakīls* who saw the Imam

Location	Name or description
Baghdad (11 named)	Abū al-Qāsim b. Abī Ḥulays
	Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Kindī
	Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Junaydī
	Hārūn al-Qazzāz
	Al-Nīlī (?)
	Abū al-Qāsim b. Dubays
	Abū ‘Abd Allāh b. Farrukh
	Masrūr al-Ṭabbākh the <i>mawlā</i> of Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Ḥādī]
	Aḥmad, son of al-Ḥasan
	Muḥammad, son of al-Ḥasan
	Ishāq al-Kātib from Banū Nībakht [=Nawbakht]
	The man with the camel fat (<i>niwā</i> ’), or perhaps date stone (<i>nawāt</i>)
The man with the sealed purse (<i>ṣāḥib al-ṣurra al-makhtūma</i>) ⁱ	
Hamadān (3 named)	Muḥammad b. Kashmard

ⁱ Sealing is a relatively common trope in the miracle narratives of the Imams and the *nāḥiya*, including, for example, the conversion narrative of Ibn Mahziyār, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 486-7.

	Ja‘far b. Ḥamdān
	Muḥammad b. ‘Umrān
Dīnawar (3 named)	Ḥasan b. Hārūn
	Aḥmad b. Ukhiyya
	Abū al-Ḥasan
Isfahan (1)	Ibn Bādhshāla
Ṣaymara (1)	Zaydān
Qumm (5 named)	Al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr
	Muḥammad b. Muḥammad
	‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ishāq
	His father,
	Al-Ḥasan b. Ya‘qūb
Rayy (5 named)	Al-Qāsim b. Mūsā
	His son
	Abū Muḥammad b. Hārūn
	The man with the pebble (<i>ṣāhib al-ḥaṣāt</i>) ⁱⁱ
	‘Alī b. Muḥammad [‘Allān al-Kulaynī?]
	Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī
	Abū Ja‘far al-Raffā’
Qazwīn (2 named)	Mirdās
	‘Alī b. Aḥmad

ⁱⁱ The man with the pebbles (*ṣāhib al-ḥaṣāt*) presumably a reference to an unnamed character for whom the Imam turned pebbles into gold, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 444-5.

F-ā-q-t-r	Two men
Shahrzūr	The maternal cousin (<i>ibn al-khāl</i>)
Fārs	The anguished man (<i>al-maḥrūj</i>)
Merv (1 named)	The man with 1000 dinars
	The man with the money and the white note
	Abū Thābit
Nishapur (1)	Muḥammad b. Shu‘ayb b. Ṣāliḥ
Yemen (5 named)	Al-Faḍl b. Yazīd
	His son, Ḥasan
	Al-Ja‘farī
	Ibn al-A‘jamī (or, “the son of the Persian”)
	al-Shimshāṭī ⁱⁱⁱ
Egypt (1 named)	The man with the two babies (<i>ṣāḥib al-mawlūdayn</i>)
	The man with the money at Mecca
	Abū Rijā’
Niṣībīn (1)	Abū Muḥammad b. al-Wajnā’
Ahwāz (1)	Al-Khuṣaynī

In order to supplement this picture of the geographical spread of the Shi‘i community loyal to the Hidden Imam during the early Occultation we can get a further sense in looking at

ⁱⁱⁱ Despite the Anatolian *nisba*, this man was the messenger (*rasūl*) of someone with *nisba* al-Yamanī. See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 491.

the locations mentioned in the narratives of reports from Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl* chapters devoted to the early Occultation period:

Table 5: Geographical locations mentioned in the Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, covering the early Occultation period

Khujand ⁱ	Balkh ^v
Bukhāra ⁱⁱ	Hind (Kashmir) ^{vi}
Āba [near Qumm] ⁱⁱⁱ	Wāsiṭ ^{vii}
Merv ^{iv}	Kufa ^{viii}

Taking the information presented in these tables all these together, the most significantly represented locations, are Baghdad, Rayy, Qumm, and, Yemen, though there is some doubt as to whether the Yemeni Hadith really represent Yemeni communities. We must, therefore be very careful not to take this data too literally.¹ The theological motivation for including the widest possible spread of geographical locations stems from the explicit claim made by the Twelver doctors that the sheer numbers of witnesses to the Imam and their geographical isolation from

ⁱ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 509.

ⁱⁱ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 519.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 503.

^{iv} Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488.

^v Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488-9.

^{vi} Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 486; 493; 505. It should be noted that this story has a legendary, fairy-tale quality to it.

^{vii} Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 486; 493; 505.

^{viii} Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 517. It should be noted, however, that this report mentions a Qummī student studying at Kufa, rather than any native Kufan relations with the Occultation faction.

¹ Most of this information appears to have been culled from the very hadith that Ibn Bābūya also cites to substantiate the *ghayba*. It is possible, then, that in some cases, a misleading *nisba* surname was used to locate someone geographically, when this name might have reflected their origin, rather than their location. We have some clues that this kind of misleading deduction was at operation here. For example, al-Faḍl b. Yazīd, listed for Yemen, appears in a report as being in Baghdad, wishing to go on ḥajj, but feeling anxious about the security situation in the country. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 490-1. It would see strange for someone to be based in Yemen, yet planning a Ḥajj from Baghdad.

each other removes the possibility that these proofs were concocted by conspiracy.² Nonetheless, there are some significant patterns that it is safe to extract. While a *wakīl* is mentioned for Kufa, no non-*wakīls* from Kufa are listed as having seen the Twelfth Imam, and the only mention of Kufa as a location involved in an Occultation story has a Qummī, rather than a Kufan as its protagonist. There are no early-Occultation reports in the *Kamāl* that provide evidence for a Kufan community that participates in the *wikāla*-network through the contribution of money or the making of requests to the Imam. Does this mean that the Kufan community, for so long the epicenter of the Shi‘i movement was excluding itself from the newly formed *ghayba*-faction?³ Something like this must be happening. Notably, we know of two other Shi‘i factions active in Iraq, and in competition with the Occultation faction of the Imamis, or the later Twelver orthodoxy: the Nuṣayrīs, who were initially part of the Occultation faction, but whose leaders were anathematized, and the Ismailis. In addition, the uprising of the Zanj in Basra is likely to have been an influential disturbance in the relations between Imamis and the institutions of Imamate.⁴

The key locations mentioned both in the Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list, and backed-up by the texts of the other reports emphasize the increasingly Eastern, Iranian components of the Imami community. The Baghdadi-Iranian axis is striking – in particular the Baghdad-Qumm axis, and this reflects what we see across the early Occultation hadith, in which a special relationship

² These, and other proofs will be discussed in later chapters.

³ Interestingly, however, Kufa was a crucial source for hadith from the Imams that were used to legitimize the idea of *ghayba*, see “Between Qumm and the West: The Occultation According to al-Kulayni and al-Katib al-Nu‘mani,” *Culture and memory in medieval Islam: essays in honour of Wilferd Madelung*, edited by Farhad Daftary and Josef W. Meri (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 106.

⁴ While I have seen no reports of Imamis supporting the Zanj among the sources I have used, there are reports which imply the uprising of the Zanj was related to the caliphal authorities’ scrutiny of the Imamis, taking the pressure off the Imamis in Samarra and Baghdad for a while, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473-4.

begins to appear between the Baghdadi *wakīls* and the Qummī community.⁵ The *Kamāl* is a continuation of this tendency, as a text by a Qummī, produced in Rayy, seeking to canonize the legitimacy of the Baghdadi *wakīls*. Taken together, the list of *wakīls* with those among the non-*wakīls* who are named suggests the strong centering of the newly consolidated community upon Baghdad, Qumm and Rayy. This suggests an ongoing movement of Imami power away from traditional loci in Kufa and Iraq, and more towards Iran. This makes sense in view of the irruption of Shi‘i support for the Qarāmiṭa in the Kufa area, in the early Occultation period, which must have tapped into a potential Imami-support base, and sapped support for the nascent Occultation faction. It also reflects an ongoing trend, in which support for the Imams increasingly was based in the east.⁶

A couple of other locations appear to be notable for the contestation between members of their communities. Ahwāz is a locus of contestation, as exemplified by Ibn Mahziyār’s doubt narrative that occurs in several different versions in different places.⁷ Notably Ahwāz was one of the key locations from which the Ismaili *da‘wa* appears to have first emerged.⁸ The community in Nishapur is mentioned by Ibn Bābūya himself as a continued problem-location even as we approach the classical era.⁹ This perhaps was part of an ongoing series of debates that we see in the pre-Occultation era.¹⁰

⁵ For the composition of Baghdadi and Qummi Shi‘ism, see Andrew Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi‘ism: Ḥadīth as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), 1-49.

⁶ See, for example, the rising prominence of Qumm as a Shi‘i town, and, in particular, the relationship between the Qummi Ash‘arī tribe and the Imams, Newman, *Formative Period*, 32-45.

⁷ We treat the case of Ibn Mahziyār in detail in chapters 5 and 7.

⁸ Farhad Daftary, *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim societies* (London: I.B. Tauris 2005).

⁹ The *Kamāl* itself was written in response to the doubts excited in the community of Nishapur over the matter of the Twelfth Imam, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 2-3.

¹⁰ For the conflict in Nishapur as a struggle between Faḍl b. Shādhān’s moderate tendencies, and the radicals of Nishapur, see Tamima Bayhom-Daou, “The Imam’s Knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī (d. 260 A.H./874 A.D.),” *BSOAS* 64, No. 2 (2001): 188-207.

3.2 The geographical location of the *wikāla*-network's leadership

3.2.1.1 *Samarra and Baghdad*

The *wikāla* network was based in Samarra' during the Imamate of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams, and continued to be so in the earliest days following al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī's death. It is clear, however, that there was an early shift from Samarra to Baghdad. The location of reports among our sources helps us to date and comprehend the transition from the institution of the Imamate in Samarra to the institution of the Envoy in Baghdad, with a transitional period in which the Envoys or *wakīls* in Baghdad maintained contact with a ‘hidden *wakīl*’ in Samarra. I will discuss this in detail in Chapters 5 and 7.

3.2.1.2 *Ḥijāz*

Though the Tenth and Eleventh Imams had been held against their will at the caliphal court in Samarra, the traditional seat of the Imams had been in the Ḥijāz, in and around Medina. Judging by the flourishing of pilgrimage literature and controversy surrounding the practice, taking pilgrimages to sites associated with the family of the Prophet (often tied into the itinerary of the *Ḥajj* pilgrimage) was a practice that was increasing in significance in this period.¹¹ Thus, it is not surprising that some early-Occultation reports *Kamāl* locate the Twelfth Imam in the Ḥijāz.¹² It is very likely that these develop out of old tropes that were circulating in reports during the lives of the manifest Imams, rather than being direct pieces of historical evidence. However, it is plausible that these reports also represent a real historical impulse to search for a new candidate for the Imamate in the sacral places of the Ḥijāz – precisely because of the long-standing association between the Imams and these places. The Ḥajj, as well as pilgrimages to

¹¹ See “*Ziyāra*,” *EI2*; Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Just Ruler (al-sultān al-‘ādil) in Shī‘ite Islam: the Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 79; Takim, *Heirs*, 64-66.

¹² For example, see, Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 227-8.

Karbala, and other key locations, continued to serve as an opportunity for far-flung Shi‘a to interact with other members of the Shi‘i community – whether Imami or of another stripe.¹³ Ibn Bābūya quotes, for example, a peculiar report in which an Egyptian travels to search for the Imam in Medina, and in particular searches for a son of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī in Ṣuryā¹⁴ near Medina, the birthplace of the Tenth Imam, ‘Alī al-Hādī.¹⁵ More detail is preserved in the Nuṣayrī tradition, in a version of the same report quoted in Khaṣībī’s *al-Hidāya al-kubrā* in which a believer goes in search of the Imam in Medina and Ṣuryā.¹⁶ In both versions, the Egyptian believer hears the voice of the Twelfth Imam, and is urged to proselytize the truth of the *ghayba* to the people of Egypt. In the Nuṣayrī reports, the Imam’s invocation occurs in the gazebo (*ẓulla*) of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī near a palace (*qaṣr*) in Ṣuryā. Thus these accounts rely on the legitimating device of association with key locations of importance to the family of the Imams. We can imagine this as being an important side-show to the political contestation between *wakīls* in Samarra and Baghdad: Imamīs were actively searching for an Imam, and they would meet at these key locations, sharing what information they had, comparing possibilities and beginning to form consensus about this new phase of the Imamate, or in some cases converting away from the perplexities of Imami Shi‘ism.¹⁷ This kind of interregional searching and process of

¹³ Note the importance of the Ḥajj as providing meeting points with many Muslims and the opportunity to proselytize for the Ismaili *da‘wa*, for example, a meeting in which Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shī‘ī met with Kutāma Berbers on Ḥajj after which he followed them back to the maghrib and planted the seeds for the establishment of the Fatimids in North Africa, Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 126.

¹⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 491-2.

¹⁵ Al-Shaykh Muḥīd, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu‘mānī al-‘Ukbarī, *Kitāb al-irshād: The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams*, translated by I.K.A. Howard (Elmhurst, N.Y.: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an Inc., 1981), 496.

¹⁶ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277-8.

¹⁷ For example, in his *Ifṭitāḥ al-da‘wa*, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān mentions the story of Ibn Ḥawshab, a Twelver who became an Ismaili missionary after meeting the Ismaili Imam on the banks of the Euphrates, Abū Ḥanīfah al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān b. Muḥammad, *Founding the Fatimid state the rise of an early Islamic empire: an annotated English translation of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān’s Ifṭitāḥ al-Da‘wa*, translated by Hamid Haji, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006) 20-29.

consensus formation is dramatized in another report in Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*. In this report, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Madā'inī goes on *Ḥajj* and starts asking around at Medina, and hears that the Imam is living in Samarra (*al-ʿaskar*). He writes to Jaʿfar 'the liar' to ask him about the Imam and the legatee (*waṣī*) after him, and we learn that Jaʿfar writes to the Qummīs to demand his financial rights from them. Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Qummī corresponds with Jaʿfar and asks him some technical questions (*masāʿil* – presumably legal and theological), to be compared with the Qummī narrations of what the earlier Imams have responded in these cases, in order to verify Jaʿfar's probity as Imam, but Jaʿfar gives him no response.¹⁸ The narrative of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Madā'inī on *Ḥajj* appears to have been compiled together with the Qummī correspondence with Jaʿfar 'the liar,' but nonetheless it gives as a sense of the interregional communication between different Shiʿi communities, involving different symbolic associations and political relations. Thus this report depicts a quest that starts with information gathering through the ritual of the *Ḥajj* in the Ḥijāz, is directed back to Samarra, the seat of the *wikāla*, leadership, as well as the pretender to the Imamate, Jaʿfar 'the liar', of whom the narrator is initially an adherent. Finally, the quest leads to the community of Qumm whose collective knowledge acts as a touchstone for the true nature of Imamate, and which proves Jaʿfar's claim to the Imamate to be false.

Another distinct trope within the Ḥijāz reports deals with claims that the Imam was to be seen on *Ḥajj*— in particular during the *ṭawāf* circumambulation of the Kaʿba.¹⁹ The clear link with earlier traditions about the Imam is demonstrated by a number of almost identical narrations stating that the Imam appears on *Ḥajj*, often with the qualification that the Imam sees the

¹⁸ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 289-90.

¹⁹ See, for example, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 444-5; 444-53; 470-2.

believers, but the believers do not see him. Some of these are explicitly linked to the Twelfth Imam,²⁰ some of these are explicitly placed in the mouths of earlier Imams, like Ja‘far al-Sādiq,²¹ and some are ambiguous, referring to the Imam merely as an anonymous “He.” Thus this appears to be the continuation of a textual tradition from the pre-*ghayba* into the *ghayba* era, which may, or may not, also have roots in actual experiences received while on *Hajj*. They should certainly be considered to participate in the creation of meaning in the lesser-*ghayba* period, but it is difficult to connect them to any more definite historical social or political formations beyond what we have already referred to of the way in which the old sacral nodes of the Shi‘i community continued to be symbolic and practical locations for the exchange of information and the creation of meaning. Thus we will return to these narratives when we deal with the theological development of the *ghayba*-idea

3.2.1.3 Qumm

Qumm is so important that it must be considered separately as a key location in the Imami world of the early *ghayba*. Even during the lifetime of the manifest Imams, Qumm had become a key location for Shi‘i intellectual life, and in particular the collection of hadith from the Imams. Qummīs represented the single most important reservoir of support for the Occultation idea and its proponents who were attempting to consolidate their control of the community. Several anecdotes in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, backed up by reports in Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya*, show the Qummīs removing their support from Ja‘far b. ‘Alī, ‘the Liar’, the Eleventh Imam’s brother, who claimed the Imamate, and instead acknowledging the existence of the Twelfth Imam. We will deal with these reports in more detail in Chapters 5-6, but suffice it to

²⁰ For example one reported by the Second ‘Envoy,’ Muhammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 440.

²¹ For example, see Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 440.

say that Qummīs travelling to Baghdad to bring money to the *nāḥiya* appear instrumental in the turn away from Ja‘far, and towards the Twelfth Imam.²²

Qummīs also clearly had a certain presence in Iraq. We have a reference to a *wakīl* with the *nisba* al-Qummī who was based at Baghdad, charged with the official business of receiving contributions from believers,²³ and the third Envoy, Ibn Rawḥ, though a Nawbakhtī, appears to have been born in Qumm, then brought up in Baghdad.²⁴ Of course, Baghdad was a cosmopolitan city which housed communities from throughout the world, and yet these kinds of direct connections between centers of Imami power suggests the formation of a Baghdadi-Qummī alliance that became instrumental in the political maneuverings of the period of crisis. We will deal with these maneuverings in more detail in the following chapters.

3.3 The Institutions of the Imamate

3.3.1 The Imam

While the Imam was, of course, absent from the political stage post-*ghayba*, he was present conceptually, and his symbolic presence suffused the institutions which he had left behind. The Occultation theory was built upon the idea of the Imam as a continuing symbolic head of the community, and for that matter, and guide for all humanity. He is referred to in the Imami sources in various ways, many of which convey an uncertainty over exactly to whom they refer – whether the Imam himself, or the institution which represents him. The term *al-imām*, is in point of fact, used rarely in the sources, even in referring to the pre-Occultation period. Reports that refer to the manifest Imams usually call them by name, or simple called “he”, with

²² See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475-6; 476-9, and discussion below.

²³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 502-3.

²⁴ Apparently Nawbakhtī was born in Qumm. See Hussain, *Occultation*, 119.

the formula (SAA),²⁵ or a related formula to identify him as the Imam. There was an interdiction placed on referring to the Twelfth Imam by name.²⁶ The Imams, including the Twelfth Imam is referred to as “Our Lord,” (*mawlānā*) and “Our Master” (*sayyidunā*), a term which is also used for other important figures. The Twelfth Imam is referred to as the *Qā'im*, the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*), and various other descriptive or honorific titles.

When direct references to the Imam could be left unsaid, the tendency was to leave them out. Thus when referring to those *tawqī'* rescripts that are believed to have come from the Imam's hand, our sources often simply say ‘he wrote’ (*kataba*) or ‘it was issued’ (*kharaja*). This also leaves the possibility open, in the early period of the *nāḥiya*, that the *wakīls* of the Eleventh Imam are maintaining continuity, without explicitly doing so in the name of any particular Imam, until such time as the succession is resolved. There are numerous examples of such ellipsis. Sometimes we have what appears to be a later interpolation clarifying who this refers to, perhaps indicating the gradual distancing of the community from the secretive habits of the pre-*ghayba* era. This habit of ellipsis must have been bred during the decades of intermittent persecution suffered by the Shi'a at the hands of the authorities, but in the early *ghayba* era this habit comes to have a particular resonance and function when the community was wracked with perplexity regarding the existence and identity of the Imam. The corrosive effects of doubt are met by an intolerance of utterance - as in the injunction against uttering the name of the Imam. It is often the most convincing historical narratives which display this euphemistic uncertainty about who is being referred to. Clearly a culture of understatement and omission was at play, which must have been a necessary convenience for the leadership of the community at a time when it was very

²⁵ See list of abbreviations, at top.

²⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 482.

unclear about how Imamic guidance in the community was to continue – if at all. The ambivalence of the terms, then perhaps act as a kind of place-holder until such time as a satisfactory consensus on the theology of the new era could be achieved. We will deal with the mechanisms of secrecy and the significance of the unspoken in greater detail in the chapters on doctrinal developments.

Instead of the word *al-imām*, there are a number of synonymous or euphemistic words that are used to indicate the hidden Imam in a text. These circumlocutions, however, maintain a certain ambiguity as to whom is intended – a textual *ghayba* that parallels his physical absence, but that has a positive valence as part of a new conception of Imamate defined by a mythopoeic absence that finds meaning in its silence.

3.3.2 *Al-gharīm*

Literally, ‘the Creditor’, this word appears only in financial contexts where members of the community are making payments of canonical taxes. It has been said that this word refers to the Imam.²⁷ However, in the early Occultation narratives, it is hard to distinguish this term from the *wakīls* who represent the Imams, and appears virtually synonymous with *al-nāḥiya* (see below). Thus, if ‘*al-gharīm*’ does refer to the Imam, it refers to him in his capacity as one to whom something is owed – loyalty, obedience, recognition and, crucially, the canonical taxes. Again, it seems possible that this could, at times, refer not to the Imam himself, but to the central financial institutions of his *wikāla*-network.²⁸ In this sense, the Imam and his administrative institutions are combined and indistinguishable.

²⁷ Massingon, for example, states that *al-gharīm* is a nickname for the Imam, *Passion*, 1: 308.

²⁸ See, for example, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 493.

3.3.3 The *nāḥiya*

The term '*nāḥiya*' is somewhat enigmatic. Although it is one of the most common terms used to denote the institutions that mediate for the Imam in the early Occultation period, it is not clear what it derives from. Literally meaning edge, region, or quarter, there is no obvious reason this should be applied to the central institutions of the Imamate. Modarressi refers to the phrase *al-nāḥiya al-muqaddasa*, translating it as 'The Holy Threshold,'²⁹ though this phrase appears nowhere among the early sources, and so is likely to derive from later Twelver discourse. Klemm translates *nāḥiya* as "community administration,"³⁰ which fits the activities assigned to it in the sources, though does not explain the origin of this terminology.

Most importantly, the word *nāḥiya* is almost never applied to the institutions of the Imamate before the Occultation period. I found it in only one instance among the early sources I surveyed, and in this case it was applied to the Occultation era and the pre-Occultation era at the same time, suggesting that the Occultation-era usage had been carried over to the pre-Occultation usage.³¹ In the pre-Occultation period the word *nāḥiya* is usually applied to the different regions that profess allegiance to the Imam, and sometimes used to indicate regions that have been assigned to the jurisdiction of a particular *wakīl*.³² This would explain why the word *nāḥiya* might be applied metonymically to the regional *wikāla*, but not why it would be applied to the central *wikāla*, or as a metonymy for the Imamate itself. In addition, narratives of the early-Occultation era often give the sense of *nāḥiya* as being a location, not just a person or institution.

²⁹ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 11.

³⁰ Klemm, "*Sufarā*," 145.

³¹ Najāshī mentions Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Hamadānī as being the latest of three generations from the same family who served the Imams, referring to them as *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*, suggesting that he may have conflated the office as was described in the Occultation period the the *wikāla* of the earlier generation. Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 344.

³² See Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 364; 376.

Thus the phrase “I made for the *nāḥiya*” (*qaṣadtu al-nāḥiya*)³³ appears to parallel the phrase “I made for Samarra” (*qaṣadtu Surra man ra ’ā*)³⁴ as a location one seeks out in order to pay one’s dues. We may speculate, then, that the application of the term *nāḥiya* eventually to the central representatives of the Imamate is an indication of the fact that regional *wakīls*, in particular those representing Baghdad, came to speak for the Imamate as a whole as a placeholder solution while the identity of the Imam was still uncertain. As a placeholder term, the word *nāḥiya* was largely used before Abū Ja‘far established the office of the pre-eminent *wakīl* or Envoy, though it continued to persist in later usage as a hangover from past conditions.

Another term used to indicate the central institutions of the Imamate is *al-dār*, the house, referring to the house of the Imam, but also the family and household of the Imam,³⁵ and by extension, the Imam himself.³⁶ This was used in pre-Occultation and during the early Occultation, though it could also fulfil the same purpose of the word *nāḥiya* as a means of strategically equivocating over the identity of the Imam. The association of the word *dār* with the institutions of the *wikāla* network is of interest in that it might give a clue as to informal structures in which the *wikāla*-network might have originated – in the retinue or household of the Imam. Notably the direct household of the Imam continued to furnish characters who are active in the reports upon the eve of the Occultation period in the form of household eunuchs (*khādim*)³⁷ and servants and slaves (*ghulām*,³⁸ *jāriya*)³⁹ who are well placed to observe key facts for posterity. It is interesting to note, that in these cases, the charismatic centrality of the Imam is

³³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 487.

³⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 490.

³⁵ See Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498.

³⁶ See, for example, Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 394.

³⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 474-5.

³⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 467-9.

³⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 517-19

diffused amongst his household who practically his intermediaries. This kind of diffusion and mediation is familiar to us from descriptions of households of other powerful men of the time, whom it was necessary to approach initially by making contact with members of their retinue. Thus Caliphs had viziers and chamberlains (*hājib*), and viziers themselves had deputies and chamberlains who carried out their functions, and prevented direct access to the powerful personage.⁴⁰ It is no surprise to us, then, that the biography of the *wakīl* ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī, credited by Twelver tradition as the First Envoy, hints at the possibility that he may have been a household servant of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams.⁴¹

In addition to the sense of diffusion of Imamic duties that these names suggest, they also introduce an ambivalence about who might be referred to. If it does indeed refer to the Imam, *al-gharīm* is euphemistic, while *al-nāḥiya* is metonymic. Of course, these kinds of circumlocutions are standard practice in referring to one who is due great respect, and they fulfill the function of allowing the reporters to avoid naming the Imam, and in particular the Twelfth Imam. However, in this case, they also allow for an ambivalence that is particularly suitable for the historical circumstances, as the *wikāla*-network continued to operate without a present Imam. While the central embodiment of the Imamate was absent, the surrounding institutions of leadership were visible, albeit in an altered form and under much stress. It seems likely that this terminological diffusion of the Imam’s functions and charisma was a convenient tool both for the high *wakīls* who took over the direct guidance of the community, as well as more distant participants in the *wikāla*-network and the transmitters of the reports about the Imam and the *wikāla*. It was convenient for all who had a stake in the continuity of the functions of the Imamate, but who

⁴⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 517-19.

⁴¹ See Chapter 6.

were not able to be explicit about the exact nature of the mediation between the Imam and his acting deputies.

3.3.4 *Wakīls* and Envoys (*safīrs*)

In Islamic legal parlance, a *wakīl* is someone who has been engaged to perform a specific function, and given power attorney on behalf of that person to make the action legally effective.⁴² The origin of the office of Imam's *wakīl* is probably a similar appointment to proxy representation on the Imam's behalf, to carry out a specific task or tasks. In our sources we see not just the Imam empowering men to operate on his behalf, but also members of the community commissioning particular men to do undertake weighty tasks for them: most often to take the canonical taxes to the Imam or to the *nāḥiya* and to see that it reaches the proper hands. These commissions are taken very seriously. Sometimes potential *wakīls* flinch under the prospect of such a weighty responsibility.⁴³ In several cases, *wakīls* make up money innocently lost with their own funds.⁴⁴ The fact that *wakīls* are commissioned both by the Imam and by the local communities complicates our sense of the *wikāla* network. It cannot be understood as a top-down command network, but rather appears to be generated as much by the local communities sending their chosen representatives to the Imam, as it is by the Imam appointing his representatives. At various instances during the lives of the manifest Imams we see evidence of tension between the Imam's chosen *wakīls* and the *wakīls* favored by the community.⁴⁵ In such cases of tension, if the Imam continued to be acknowledged by the community, then perhaps the Imam's choice would

⁴² Ibn Bābūya, *Faqīh*, 3: 83-88.

⁴³ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr Ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī, the younger, *Dalā'il al-imāma* (Qumm: Mu'assasat al-ba'tha: 1413 H [1992-3 CE]), 519-20.

⁴⁴ See below, in this Chapter.

⁴⁵ There are several examples of the complex relationship between local sentiment and the will of the Imams in Kashshī's *Rijāl*, see for example, the case of Fāris b. Ḥātim, 371-373. See also Tamima Bayhom-Daou's analysis of the relations between al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī, the Imam and a rival *wakīl*, "The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī (d. 260 A.H./ 874 A.D.)." *BSOAS*, 64 (2001): 202-3.

ultimately win out. However, in moments of crisis, the candidates for Imamic authority had to court these regional *wakīls*.

The role of the *wakīls* changed over several generations of service under the Imams. By the time of the Occultation the office of *wakīl* had become sufficiently institutionalized for it to continue to exert authority even in the absence of the Imam, and arguably, its existence was one of the key factors both in the rejection of the most viable candidate for the Imamate, Ja‘far b. ‘Alī ‘the Liar’ due to the incompatibility of the allegiances of the *wakīls* to his deceased brother and Ja‘far. The word Envoy (*safīr*) is not heavily attested before the Occultation,⁴⁶ but appears to have been employed by Nu‘mānī and al-Shaykh al-Mufīd as a way of setting them apart from the *wakīls* of the pre-Occultation era,⁴⁷ and, perhaps more importantly, from the gnostic *bābs* against whom orthodoxy would increasingly be defined.⁴⁸

High-*wakīls* are clearly present and active in the reports Ibn Bābūya and others pass down.⁴⁹ *Wakīl* is used to refer to both central figures, and less central figures in the network. At some points *wakīl* appears to refer to the single, pre-eminent figure in sole charge of the *wikāla*, sometimes one of the classical four Envoys, another named high-*wakīl*, Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1.

⁴⁷ Sachedina suggests that Mufīd uses the term *safīr* in a non-technical sense, because he includes Ḥājiz among the Envoys, however as we will see, Ḥājiz did in fact appear in a role very similar to the role of Envoy ultimately established by Abū Ja‘far and Ibn Rawḥ. See Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 86.

⁴⁸ See below, Chapter 8.

⁴⁹ The clearest statement about the office of high-*wakīlate* in his *Kamāl al-dīn* is a hadith I refer to as the ‘nuwwāb hadith,’ quoted at length in Chapter 5. In this report, the Twelfth Imam announces the removal of the *wikāla* from Samarra to Baghdad, and describes his intention to appoint a man in Baghdad to whom to bring money and from whom *tawqī‘āt* would issue. These men are collectively referred to as deputies (*nuwwāb*). The miraculous nature of this proclamation of the Child Imam notwithstanding, this description fits too well with the theological conception of the *Safīrate* to be taken as a reliable description of the state of the office of *wakīl* upon the death of al-‘Askarī, given the gradual development of the conception of the office in our sources, suggesting that this report was generated some time between the deaths of al-Kulaynī and the composition of the *Kamāl*. Note that no names are mentioned in this report, as might be expected from its function of underlining the legitimacy of the authority of the high-*wakīls*/ Envoys, which again suggests that Ibn Bābūya’s conception of the *Safīrate* is intermediate, and that the earliest phase of this deputyship was disputed. Contrast this with the very clear statements issuing from the Imam naming Abū Ja‘far as successor to his father, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, v.2, 283, 43; and Ibn Rūḥ as Abū Ja‘far’s successor, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 503-4.

b. Aḥmad *al-wakīl*,⁵⁰ or Ḥājiz, or an unnamed figure. However, a named figure is never termed deputy (*nāʿib*) which again suggests that this mention of the *nuwwāb* deputies in the statement of the Twelfth Imam was a later theologizing formulation. I refer to the highest echelons of the leadership of the financial network as ‘high-*wakīls*’, as this best reflects the parlance of the historical reports, while Envoy is reserved for the position once it has become the office of pre-eminent leadership familiar from Ṭūsī’s theologized formulization of the Four Envoys.

It should be emphasized that the most common word used to refer to the highest figures in the Occultation-era *nāḥiya* is simply ‘*wakīl*,’ regardless of whether these figures were canonized as Envoys later or not. These reports carry a strong sense of the importance of the *wakīls* in the structure of the community. In a couple of reports, a believer asks urgently who is the *wakīl*,⁵¹ as in earlier periods a believer might have asked after the identity of the Imam. And indeed a believer has very practical religious purposes for this urgent question. As we have seen, if a believer cannot find the correct recipient to pay the canonical taxes, then their soteriological reward is nullified. Thus for practical purposes, in the Occultation era, and indeed before, knowing the properly designated official is a matter that has a direct impact on one’s fate in the afterlife.

In the earliest phase of the *nāḥiya*, the *wakīls* form a kind of oligarchic old guard who share leadership in the name of the Imam. This shared leadership might have been the crucible in which we the patterns of support and contestation of the early *ghayba* era started to emerge.

⁵⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 493.

⁵¹ Thus, in one hadīth, we are told by the narrator, “In that same year, I saw a woman at Baghdad and she asked me about the *wakīl* of our *mawlā* - who he was - and some of the Qummīs had told her that he was Abū al-Qāsim b. Rūḥ.” Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 519. In another report, a believer wakes up at night in panic at the thought that he might have sent his contributions to the wrong person, and a disembodied voice calls out to him to send them to Ḥājiz. See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498. See also Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488.

3.3.5 Activities of the regional *wakīls*

The word *wakīl* is also used as to refer to one of the many regional agents. Thus we hear of a man called al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Qatāt al-Ṣaydalānī, who is referred to as “the *wakīl* of the time in Wāsiṭ”⁵² – clearly from the context, the pre-eminent member of the Imami community in Wāsiṭ. In order to understand the functions of these regional *wakīls*, we can also analyze the reported activities of the *wakīls* who are named in Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list of *wakīls* according to region. This places emphasis on the activities of gathering money and taking it personally, or sending it with some other person to the central *nāḥiya*, then bringing back receipts, notes, letters, boons and blessings to the individual senders.

During the Occultation period we have evidence both of hereditary inheritance of the office of regional *wakīl*,⁵³ and we also clearly see evidence of the *nāḥiya* issuing instructions as to whom the believers should use as their *wakīls* for communication with the center. Thus, following the death of Ḥājiz, a believer is instructed, “if you wish to deal with anyone, deal with al-Asadī at Rayy”.⁵⁴ Jassim Hussain suggests that until his death al-Asadī had the role of a super-regional *wakīl* responsible for all of Iran, but that following his death, the Iranian *wakīls* reported directly to the center again,⁵⁵ but this is based on an assumption that the ‘Amrīs must definitely be in control at the center. Our information is too scarce to be sure of the exact nature of the network, and it seems equally possible that some *wakīls* sent their money directly to the center, and some sent them to a regionally-based figure like al-Asadī, on an *ad hoc* basis, or according

⁵² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 505.

⁵³ For instance in the family of Ibn Mahziyār, Kashshī, 376-77, or the family of Ibrāhīm b. Muhammad al-Hamadānī, Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 344; Hussain, *Occultation*, 82.

⁵⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488.

⁵⁵ Hussain, *Occultation*, 124.

to local custom. We will deal in detail with the distinctive roles played by Hājiz and al-Asadī in the early Occultation period in Chapters 5-7.

Amongst the Occultation hadith, the duties of the *wakīls* and their messengers are expressed through the unexpected mouthpiece of the ‘Abbasid Caliph. Challenged by Ja‘far the Liar who wants a group of delegates from Qumm to render up the canonical taxes to himself, even though he cannot produce the signs they require, the Caliph denies Ja‘far, saying of the Qummīs: “The people are messengers, and nothing is incumbent upon a messenger except a clear communication (*al-qawmu rusulun wa mā ‘alā al-rasūli illā al-balāgh al-mubīn*).”⁵⁶ This passage projects a number of aspects of the *rasūl* messenger’s ideal obligations. The messenger needs some mechanisms of verification to ensure that the delivery reaches its proper recipient. Until delivery, the messenger has a personal responsibility for the safe arrival of the items in their trust. In this hadith, the words *wakīl* and *rasūl* appear in close collocation, used in their non-technical, etymological senses of one who is entrusted of a task (*wakīl*), and one who carries a message (*rasūl*). The phrase “we are a group, hired servants,” (*innā qawmun musta’jirūna*) is difficult, but suggests that they are (ingenuously or disingenuously) claiming to be mere hired functionaries, and not themselves responsible for choosing the fate of the money, but merely responsible for delivering it to he who possesses the right signs. Thus this report presents a certain ambiguity between fully responsible *wakīls* who are active in the search for the next Imam, and mere *rasūl* messengers who are purely reactive.⁵⁷ We may doubt the historicity of this report, but nonetheless the image of the organization of the *wikāla* must have been one that

⁵⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 477-8.

⁵⁷ A similar circumstance, also transmitted in order to disprove the legitimacy of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, occurs in a report in which a *rasūl* messenger is sent by a man from Balkh, and instructed only to hand over the money to someone who could respond in appropriately to a note, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488-9.

was plausible to Ibn Bābūya's generation, which was within living memory of the leadership of the Envoys.

In other reports we do see a clearer distinction between the mere *rasūl* and the higher-placed regional *wakīl*. Thus, Ja'far b. Muḥammad Ibn Mattīl, a high-placed Baghdad *wakīl* who at one time was expected to succeed to the pre-eminent position of leadership,⁵⁸ is disgusted that he is sent by Abū Ja'far to carry certain items as gifts to a loyal Imami in Wāsiṭ. Ibn Mattīl tells us, "Thereupon, a severe depression entered me and I said "Should one such as me be sent on this matter, and carry with me a paltry thing (*wataḥ*)?"⁵⁹ It is likely that there is a political valence to this report that expresses something of the relationship between Abū Ja'far and Ibn Mattīl, but it clearly also suggests that regional *wakīls* were figures of high prestige, considered separate from the regular cohorts of porters and messengers. In some reports a slave appears in the role of the *rasūl* messenger.⁶⁰ In Kulaynī's *Kāfi* and the *Hidāya* of Khaṣībī, another term appears: 'porter,' (*ḥammāl*), which appears equivalent to *rasūl* messenger or *wakīl* agent.⁶¹ It is notable that in this report, the porters are given loaves of bread for their efforts – a humble payment, sure enough, which may have been salutary remuneration for some, but perhaps for others represented more of a symbolic gift from the establishment of the Imam which would have carried some sacral significance. This may also be an indication of the humble nature of those engaged to carry out the business of the *wikāla*. This is perhaps corroborated by the disgust of Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. Mattīl when asked to transport money on behalf of the *wikāla*.⁶²

⁵⁸ See Hussain, *Occultation*, 108.

⁵⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 505.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 495.

⁶¹ *Kāfi*, 1:517-518; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277.

⁶² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 505.

3.3.7 Lower functionaries

In addition to the Imam's appointed *wakīls*, and the largely locally appointed or hereditary regional *wakīls* in the hierarchy, our reports abound with other, lesser figures, involved in carrying out the functions of the Imamate, or appointed by regional figures to travel to the seat of the Imam, including messengers (*rasūl*),⁶³ slaves and servants (*ghulām*),⁶⁴ servant girls and concubines (*jāriya*),⁶⁵ eunuchs (*khādim*)⁶⁶ and porters (*ḥammāl*) who do the bidding of the Imam, the *nāhiya*, the regional *wakīls*, and the followers of the Imam in general. The regional *wakīls* appear to have appointed trusted messengers to do the important work of transporting the money, items and communications of the *wikāla*. This job of transportation and communication was clearly very important and seems to overlap with the roles of the *wakīls* – suggesting that, though there was a hierarchy of status attached to the nobility of certain tasks, boundaries between roles within the hierarchy of the *wikāla* were not very clearly defined, a fact which is reflected in terminology, for in some cases *rasūl* messenger appears to be synonymous with *wakīl* agent.⁶⁷

3.3.8 The household of the Imam

Though we may expect servants and messengers to rank below *wakīls* in prestige, it is clear that the Imam's servants, and other figures attached to the household of the Imams had considerable influence. Thus, in addition to the hierarchies we see in the external *wikāla*-network, it is worth mentioning a distinct sub-group of reports that involve the household staff of the Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. These servants and slaves are involved in the *wikāla*-network in

⁶³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 495.

⁶⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 491.

⁶⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 517-19.

⁶⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475-6. See also the discussion of the important role played by the eunuch-servant archetype in the early Occultation era reports: in particular ʿAqīd and Badr, below, Chapter 4.

⁶⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 477-8.

by virtue of being in the Imam's service. They also play a significant role in adding detail to the reports surrounding the birth of the Twelfth Imam and the death of the Eleventh Imam, given their unique viewpoint as insiders to the household of the Imams. Again, whatever the historicity of these accounts, they do, at the very least, project an image of trusted servants employed within the Imam's household as having a significant role in the projection of meaning of the death of the Eleventh Imam and the nature of the succession to the Twelfth Imam. We will deal with the archetype of the household servant in more detail in the case of 'Aqīd and Badr the eunuchs, in Chapter 4, and also the possibility that 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd himself was a servant, in Chapter 6.

We also have reports in which activities apparently unconnected to the *wikāla*-network's main function of collecting canonical taxes and distributing messages and boons, are seen to be governed by the logic of the *wikāla*. Thus, Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Junayd, acting as a factotum for the Imam, is ordered to sell a slave (*ghulām*), and return the money to the Imam, but finds the weight of the gold short, and adds from his own supply, only to have this addition returned to him.⁶⁸ Here he is acting on behalf of the Imam, and it appears to be private business without an explicit legal or ritual dimension, but this narrative acts according to the rules that govern *wakīl*'s actions in handling the canonical taxes – when carrying out the business of the Imam, the one appointed has a personal responsibility to ensure that the Imam does not suffer a loss. Clearly all of the money of the *nāḥiya* was governed by a high degree of care and responsibility.

3.3.8.1 Women of the household

Women played an important role in the Imam's household, especially after the death of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī. The intimate access to the Imam held by the women of the household gives them a unique role in the Occultation narratives. Women have important moments of access to

⁶⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 486.

the Imams, and at the births of the Imams, including the Child Imam, and we see them playing important roles in determining the biological destiny of the Imamic line, partly as childbearers and childcarers,⁶⁹ but also as matchmakers,⁷⁰ and, in the Occultation reports, they play a very important role as eyewitnesses who can plausibly claim the kind of access to the person of the Imams that would be required to account for some of the intimate details which emerge in these reports. In particular, as we will see in Chapter 4, the aunt and grandmother of the Child Imam play important roles, both as protagonists and as narrators of reports regarding the birth and care of the Child Imam.

3.3.9 Social hierarchies

As we have seen, there were clear social hierarchies and ranks of prestige preserved and regulated through the operation of the *wikāla*-network. However, the origins and ranks of participants in the early Occultation community appear to have been varied. Thus, the first two canonized Envoys bore the nickname “the fat merchant” or “the oil merchant,” (*al-sammān, al-zayāt*).⁷¹ While it is dangerous to rely on *nisba* nicknames for precise information, due to the passage of the generations in which a personal nickname might become a family surname, we can at least use these names to suggest that a certain amount of social mobility was possible within the *wikāla* network. In particular we see a combination between titles which indicate membership in the old Persian gentry (*al-buzurjī*,⁷² *dihqān*,⁷³ *marzubān*⁷⁴) and epithets that indicate involvement in commerce or a trade, such as embroiderer/ trader in embroidered fabrics

⁶⁹ See, for example, the role of Ḥakīma, the paternal aunt of the Eleventh Imam, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 517-19; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 249.

⁷⁰ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 264.

⁷¹ See Chapters 6 and 7 for the specific reports that carry these names.

⁷² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 516; 517.

⁷³ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 406-7; 407-10.

⁷⁴ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 518.

(*washshā*'),⁷⁵ and apothecary (*‘aṭṭār*).⁷⁶ A further study that traced the appearance of these epithets in the Shi‘i biographical dictionaries over the generations would be a desirable step to provide further information about the social make-up of the prominent followers of the Imams.

3.3.10 Networks and hierarchy

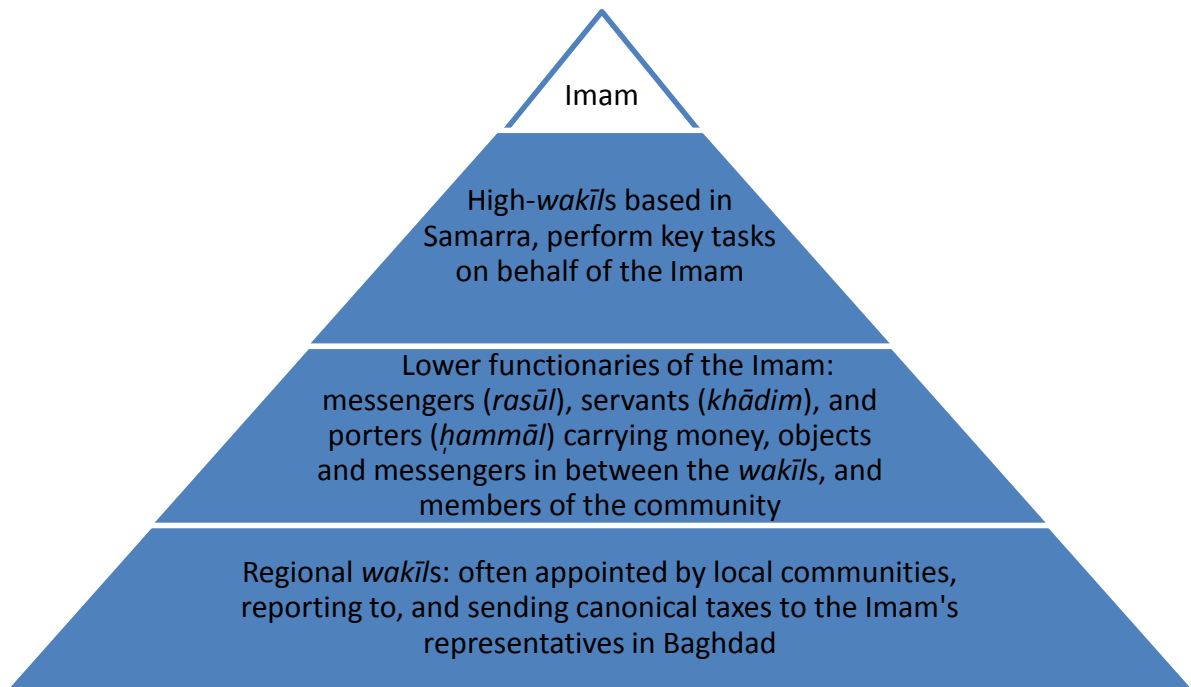
There is very little direct information about the operation of the *wikāla*-network. There has been tendency in recent scholarship to overstate the level of institutional development of the *wikāla* network suggesting that it was a formal hierarchy. While there are certainly hierarchies implied in our sources, including the kinds of institutional and social hierarchies mentioned above, there is much in our sources that suggests the informal or traditional nature of the institutions involved. Rather than a clearly and intentionally structured hierarchy, then, we should probably imagine the *wikāla* network to be an organic network which its members were able to move within and manipulate to achieve their goals, by employing family connections, social rank, and capabilities associated with their trades and professions. While we do have clear examples of *wakīls* being appointed, we must be careful not to conflate the actions of an individual with an office or institution.

As far as we can discern from our sources, the structure of the hierarchy in the Imami community before al-‘Askarī died in 260/874 would have looked something like the following diagram. However, the boundaries between the ranks was intensely blurred, and therefore cannot be imagined to mimic something like a formal bureaucracy in which posts were clearly appointed and differentiated.

Figure 1: Hierarchy of the *wikāla*-network before the Occultation

⁷⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 474.

⁷⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442-3.



In addition, this diagram must not be allowed to over-represent the degree to which the community was organized in top-down fashion, by Imamic fiat. On the contrary, at the regional level, communities had a great degree of autonomy. Even during the lives of the manifest Imams, the Imams had to carefully negotiate the way they attempted to project their influence at the local level.⁷⁷ This regional autonomy is an important aspect of the community's continuity during moments of crisis. Not everything depended upon the Imam, and, at moments of crisis, local *wakīls* and other figures of prestige in the community could maintain affairs until the Imamate was reestablished on an even keel. The Occultation era is one such a moment, though in this case, the *wakīls* who took charge of the community in the Occultation era eventually supplied a quasi-Imamic proxy for the Imam, in the form of the Envoys, rather than establishing a new Imam after the crisis. However, the importance of the symbolic authority of the Imam which

⁷⁷ See for example, the case of Fāris b. Ḥātim in Kashshī's *Rijāl*, 371-373. See also Tamima Bayhom-Daou, "The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī (d. 260 A.H./ 874 A.D.)." *BSOAS*, 64 (2001): 202-3.

justified the whole network was never dispensable, and although the *wakīls* and then the Envoys took control of the community following 260/874, they continued to need the symbol of the Imam, albeit an absent Imam.

After the Eleventh Imam had died, it was his close *wakīls* who maintained the central institutions of the Imamate. After a generation, however, when these men died out, more localized nodes of authority exerted themselves, and we encounter multiple stories of renegade *wakīls* who opposed the authority of the Envoy Abū Ja‘far.⁷⁸ Thus, though for the first few years of the Occultation era, this ideal diagram might have continued to hold meaning while the old guard of al-‘Askarī’s followers held sway and exerted continuity, increasingly, it was alliances of regional *wakīls*, high-*wakīls* and scholars, rather than the will of the Imam, which determined the nature of the community.

3.4 The functions of the financial network

Money appears as the primary object of the activities of the *wakīls*. When our sources mention the activities of the *wakīls*, they usually involve monetary and non-monetary contributions to the Imam, though requests for boons and blessings are also regularly mentioned. The distribution and preservation of wealth must also be a crucial element for any historical study of power relations. Though wealth was not by any means the only concern of the leaders of the Shi‘i community, control of financial resources will always form a pattern of vested interests that seek to sustain themselves through crisis.

3.4.1 The sacral nature of the financial network

While the financial regulation of the community was a key concern for the high *wakīls/Safīrs*, the activity of collecting canonical taxes was not of purely, or even of primarily

⁷⁸ See Chapters 5 and 7.

financial significance for those whose responsibility it was. As we have seen in the previous chapter, both *khums* and *zakāt* have a purifying, salvific function. Our sources often make explicit the connection between the contribution of money and the salvation that is to be sought through acknowledgement of the Imamate. In one report from a certain Naṣr b. al-Ṣabbāḥ al-Balkhī, we learn the following:

عن نصر بن الصباح البلخي قال : كان بمر و كاتب كان للخوزستاني - سماه لي نصر - واجتمع عنده ألف دينار
للناحية فاستشارني ، فقلت : أبعث بها إلى الحاجزي ، فقال : هو في عنقك إن سألتني الله عز وجل عنه يوم
القيامة ، فقلت : نعم

Naṣr b. al-Ṣabbāḥ al-Balkhī sad: There was at Merv, a bureaucrat (*kātib*) belonging to al-Khūzistānī (Naṣr told me his name) and he had gathered 1000 dinars for the *nāḥiya*, and he sought counsel from me: So I said, “send it to al-Ḥājizī” [Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshā’]. He said: “Is it upon your neck if God asks me about it on the Day of Judgement?” I said “Yes.”⁷⁹

This report shows us two elements: the soteriological importance of the money for the donor, but also the responsibility borne by the *wakīl* who carries it on his behalf. The misdirection of funds has direct implications for the salvation of the bureaucrat who demands a promise that his interlocutor will take responsibility ‘upon his own neck’ should al-Ḥājizī’s claim to be the true intermediary for the Hidden Imam prove to be false. The responsibility of acting as a *wakīl*, then, is grave, for the soteriological consequences of non-payment of the canonical taxes are transferred from the donor to the *wakīl* carrying them. Such a transfer is necessary to allow the system to function, precluding the casual misappropriation of funds.

⁷⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488.

How money is earned and handled before it reaches the Imam is understood to be of prime significance in its acceptability, and therefore, in the reward it holds for the believer. Thus one must abstain before handling the money, and the way it is earned must not be *ḥarām* in other ways – such as deriving from the sale of a singing girl.⁸⁰ No money is to be accepted from people beyond the community – thus there is a story of a robe held by a Shi‘i-Sunni business partnership, which is sent to the *nāḥiya*, but half of which is returned due to its partial ownership by a Sunni.⁸¹ This anecdote emphasizes the claim of the Imamate that the function of payment of canonical taxes is purely ritual to benefit the donor, rather than having any benefit to the Imam himself.⁸²

3.4.2 Gathering of funds

Many reports that deal with the succession to the Eleventh Imam include a theme of communities and individuals trying to find out whom to bring their money to. In some cases this involves money that is being transported at the time of the Imam’s death, but there are also questions and doubts over who to send money to well into the Baghdad period, under the Safirate of Ibn Rawḥ.⁸³ These reports indicate that the impulse to send money to the *nāḥiya* continued to be strong, despite the great doubts and controversies that wracked the community during the early Occultation. However, in addition to the impulse to continue the customary payments to the *nāḥiya*, there was also an opposing impulse to withhold money from the *nāḥiya* due to the great doubts surrounding the succession to the Eleventh Imam. We will deal with the precise formulations of the legal debate on what should happen to these contributions in Chapter 5.

⁸⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483-5.

⁸¹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 509.

⁸² As we have seen in Chapter 2, the hadiths of the Imams clearly display the intention of defending the Imam from any accusation of desire for personal gain in collecting the canonical taxes.

⁸³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 519.

Clearly, however, there were some contributions being paid, though it is quite possible that the sources distort our understanding of these payments. In what follows, we will attempt to glean a general picture of the nature of these payments.

Money was sent both by groups and by individuals. Usually money collected in groups came from a particular area, or else from a particular group of people (*qawm*). Payments mentioned in the *Kamāl* include amounts from 5 to 1000 dinars. The table below gives a summary of all of the payments explicitly mentioned in the early ghayba reports in the *Kamāl*.

Table 6: Contributions to the *nāḥiya* during the early Occultation period, from Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*⁸⁴

Provenance	Circumstances	Contribution	Received by	Page no.
Qummis	They arrived at Samarra after death of Eleventh Imam, looking for his successor	1010 dinars	Servant of the boy Imam	475-6
Nishapur community	<i>Wakīl</i> Muḥammad b. Shādhān found the money short 20	500 dirhams	Muḥammad b. Ja'far [Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī] <i>wakīl</i> for Rayy	485-6

⁸⁴ In addition to the Occultation-era contributions mentioned here, there is a further, illuminating account that dates immediately pre-Occultation, to the Imamate of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, when a certain 'Ātiq Aḥmad b. Ishāq, accompanied by Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh from Qumm brought to the house of the Imam in Samarra a leather bag (*ḡirāb*) stuffed with a garment from Tabaristan (*kisā' ṭabarī*) in which were 160 purses of dinars and dirhams, and upon each purse was the seal of its owner. These contributions were brought to the Eleventh Imam who had upon his knee a radiant boy who enumerated all the contributions and the names of the contributors, and whether the money was pure or impure, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 456-8.

	dirhams, and added his own			
Man from the Sawād	Instructed not to send 400 dirhams from the estate of his cousin	x (less 400 dirhams)	<i>al-gharīm</i>	486
Merv community	Money gathered by a <i>kātib</i> of al-Khūzistānī.	1000 dinars	Al-Ḥājizī	488
Man from Balkh	Sent money anonymously, but was named in the reply.	5 dinars	Ḥājiz	488
Muḥammad b. Hārūn	Spending the night in Baghdad, he thinks he will to give, and someone immediately appears to receive the contribution	Ḥawānīt worth 530 dinars	Not mentioned	492
Ibn Ramīs/Rumays	Ḥājiz forgot to deliver the dinars, and the Imam wrote asking for them	10 dinars	Ḥājiz	493
Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Abī Ḥulays	10 of the dinars were from his non-believing	50 dinars	Not mentioned	494-5

acting for a group (<i>qawm</i>) of believers	female cousin, whose name was thus omitted from <i>du‘ā</i> prayer in return			
Baghdad community	Abū Ja‘far sends the money	1000 dinars	‘the <i>Wakīl</i> ’ in Samarra	495
-	-	A robe (<i>thawb</i>)	Al-‘Amrī	502
Zaynab, a woman from Āba	She approaches Ja‘far b. Muḥammad Ibn Mattīl as an intermediary	300 dinars	Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ, the Third Envoy	504
Nishapur community	<i>Wakīl</i> Muḥammad b. Shādhān collected money found it short 20 dirhams, and added his own money.	500 dinars	Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī <i>wakīl</i> for Rayy	509
Qummī cloth-merchant (<i>bazzāz</i>)	It was split in two and half was sent back because part-owned by a Sunni (<i>murji‘ī</i>)	A fine robe (<i>thawb nafīs</i>)	The Imam (his Lord – <i>mawlā</i>)	510

This gives us a certain tantalizing glimpse of the kinds of contributions that were possible, though a lot of information is missing, and we must be very careful not to take these

figures too literally. We cannot tell how often such contributions were made, though we must presume that given the state of transportation, they are not likely to have come more than every year. Some of these contributions are explicitly gathered from a group of believers – presumably the contributions of an entire community. Thus Muḥammad b. Shādhān is the *wakīl* of Nishapur, who, we presume, forwarded the entire contributions collected from the Imamis of Nishapur at that moment – 500 dinars.⁸⁵ 1000 dinars is the sum that is paid by the Qummīs and by Abū Ja‘far in his capacity as *wakīl* representing Baghdad. The quantities are tropes, however, for all the exactness of accounting that appears in some of the narratives to demonstrate the meticulous miraculous divination issuing from the *nāḥiya*. 1000 dinars, as the upper amount that appears in the narratives should be taken to stand for ‘a large sum,’ though it is at least helpful in that it gives a ball-park figure for the kinds of sums that communities were forwarding (or were supposed to forward) during the early Occultation period. It is notable that these sums appear much smaller than the largest sums that appear with regard to the pre-Occultation era. Modarressi states, “At the time of his death, Mūsā [al-Kāzīm]’s agents had large sums for him in their possession, from ten to thirty and even seventy thousand dinars.”⁸⁶ It does seem likely that the two most significant Shi‘i communities of the period – Qumm and Baghdad, should make substantially higher contributions than Nishapur, though it is perhaps surprising that Merv also appears as sending this upper amount of 1000 dinars.

⁸⁵ Note that this amount appears twice, though it is two versions of the same story, so we cannot take it as corroboration of the facts.

⁸⁶ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 14. These reports are striking, though they may partly represent a longer collection cycle, or the distortion of the sources over time. Decrease in revenues may have been as much a result of the repression during the reign of Mutawakkil, which seems to have been partly directed at the threat at Imami fiscal competition with the Caliphate. See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 15-16. Imami sources show the Imams’ collection of funds was perceived as a threat – including accusations from the Caliph that the Imam was collecting even the *kharāj* land tax from his followers, Modarressi, *Crisis*, 13.

Kennedy, citing Eliyahu Ashtor, notes that by the fourth/tenth century, the price of one gold dinar had dropped to 15 dirhams to the dinar, and that 1 *raṭl* (406.25 grams) of bread cost 1/10 dirhams.⁸⁷ Thus 1000 dinars would represent around 150,000 *raṭls* of bread, a substantial amount for an ordinary individual, but perhaps not a huge amount from the perspective of affluent merchants or large-scale landowners. The typical contribution for a single individual (presumably relatively affluent) in the *Kamāl* is 10 dinars, representing around 1500 *raṭls* of bread, which might represent one or two years of subsistence for a comfortably-provided-for peasant. On the other hand, the woman from Āba, near Qumm, was carrying 300 dinars. It is notable, then, that this was a personal contribution from a rather rich woman, who had enough affluence and independence to make contributions in her own name.⁸⁸

The man from the Sawād is instructed to remove from his contribution 400 dirhams (=18 dinars), which rightly belonged to the estate of his cousin. This is within the same order of magnitude as the 10 dinars from the believer in Balkh, giving us the sense of the kind of contribution to be expected from the estate of a relatively well-off member of the community.⁸⁹

Endowments and legacies must have been another significant source of income for the *nāḥiya*, over and above the regular and irregular contributions of individuals and communities. We have a few references to *waqf* endowments made over to the *nāḥiya* – in particular, endowments maintained from the pre-*ghayba* era,⁹⁰ though there is at least one *waqf* stated as

⁸⁷ See Philip Kennedy, *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 98, n 57.

⁸⁸ The existence of rich and powerful women in ‘Abbasid era society, is not, of course, without parallel. For examples drawn from the apogee of ‘Abbasid society, see the fortunes and activities of the women of the ‘Abbasid Caliphs, Nabia Abbott, *Two Queens of Baghdad, Mother and Wife of Hārūn al Rashīd*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

⁸⁹ If this represents the *khums*, then it should be around 20% of total profits, which would then represent an estate with profits of 50 dinars/ year for the man from Balkh, and 90 dinars/year for the man from the Sawād.

⁹⁰ Ṭūsī mentions a *waqf* endowment managed by the regional *wakīl* al-Qāsim b. ‘Alā’ in Ādharbayjān since the time of the Eleventh Imam, Hussain, *Occultation*, 124.

being made out to Abū Ja‘far: a man named Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Aswad is seen as habitually managing the money of this particular *waqf*: “I used to transport the money which had been made over to Abū Ja‘far by way of *waqf*.”⁹¹ We cannot be sure from this whether this refers to a number of *waqf* endowments that this person is responsible for, or just one. Also, we cannot tell whether this may be a newly endowed *waqf*, or if all of these carry over from the pre-Occultation period.⁹² However, even though it is possible that the flow of new endowments may have been drying up in the early Occultation period, standing endowments clearly represented a crucial source of income. This becomes even clearer in the statements that issued from the *nāḥiya* that suggest that the misappropriation of such income was becoming a significant problem.

In a final note of skeptical caution about this image of a financial system, while the ‘historical’ hadiths depict consistent and significant contributions from various far-flung communities to the *nāḥiya* continuing through the early Occultation period, the legal and theological pronouncements that issue from the *nāḥiya* (see chapters below) show that failure to pay canonical taxes, and the misappropriation of *waqf* funds made out to the Imamate must have been relatively common, and demonstrate the difficulties faced in convincing the communities that continuing payment was required in this new era. Again, the absence of Kufa and Basra from Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list of people who saw the Imam suggests that a significant section of the Imami world was dissenting from the new order of the high *wakāls*.

⁹¹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 501-2.

⁹² See for example, the continuation of pre-Occultation *waqfs* of ‘Alī al-Hādī, the Tenth Imam, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 522; and al-Qāsim b. ‘Alā’ looking after the endowment belonging to al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the Eleventh Imam, Hussain, *Occultation*, 124.

3.4.3 Receipts, notes, letters and rescripts

A number of different means are used for communication with believers and the acknowledgement of their contributions. These are the receipt (*qabaḍ, qubūḍ*) note (*ruq‘a*), the letter (*kitāb, risāla*), and the rescript (*tawqī‘*). Receipts (*qabaḍ, qubūḍ*) were handed out once contributions had been received by officials at the *nāḥiya*. It appears that these receipts were designed to guarantee the honesty of the lower-ranking *wakīls*, to ensure that they reached the high-*wakīls*. Thus, in one report, a *wakīl* bringing money to the second ‘*Safīr*’, Abū Ja‘far, before he died, is told to hand it over to Ibn Rawḥ (who would later be the third *Safīr*) presumably acting as a deputy to Abū Ja‘far. When the *wakīl* asks for a receipt, Ibn Rawḥ complains to Abū Ja‘far, and Abū Ja‘far confirms that “whatever reaches Abū al-Qāsim [Ibn Rawḥ] reaches me.” It appears that a receipt may have been necessary for every stage of the *wikāla*-network, up until the money reaches its final destination.

The note (*ruq‘a*) appears to have some overlap with the receipt, in that it was issued from the *nāḥiya* to the believer in formal response to the reception of contributions, or some other attempt at communication with the Imam. Sometimes the two are conflated.⁹³ These notes are most often the vehicle for a petition to the Imam or prayer (*du‘ā‘*) from the Imam,⁹⁴ asking for forgiveness⁹⁵ or a blessing. They are often in response to some particular circumstance – such as the request for the birth of a child.⁹⁶ They do not appear to contain legal or spiritual pronouncements, however. Letters (*kitāb, risāla*) do not appear to have a clear technical sense in the reports, but refer to general correspondence,⁹⁷ a treatise on a particular subject.⁹⁸

⁹³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 494.

⁹⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488.

⁹⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 490.

⁹⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 489 – this report does not include the word *ruq‘a*, but follows the format of other accounts of *ruq‘a* notes.

⁹⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473; 475-6.

⁹⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498.

The most formal means of communication issued by the Imamate was the rescript or *tawqīʿ*. These formal statements include official anathematizations issued to errant members of the community, as well as prayers to say during the era of the Occultation *ghayba*, legal and theological advice, and statements about the legitimacy and succession of the ‘*Safīrs*’. While the *tawqīʿ* rescripts appear to have had a community-level significance in defining boundaries and practices for all believers, rather than merely responding to individual prayers and petitions, they usually appear in the reports as issued to individual believers, rather than in the form of community-wide encyclicals,⁹⁹ though it is very likely that some of them were meant for wider distribution.¹⁰⁰ Note, however, that not all *tawqīʿ* rescripts clearly appear to have been issued from one of the canonical Envoys, or the well-known *wakīls*.¹⁰¹ An important subcategory of letters to the Imam are sets of legal questions (*masāʿil*) which are often the occasion for *tawqīʿ* rescripts.¹⁰² These responsa form a generic bridge between communications with the Imams in the pre-Occultation period, and later legal genre between Shiʿi jurists and members of the community.¹⁰³ All of these types of communication, whether of practical or explicitly theological nature appear to have some sacral character in the sources, in which they are surrounded by anecdotes of the miraculous effects of the Imam’s intervention.

In Ibn Bābūya’s chapter dedicated to rescripts, the majority involve simple transactions of money and blessings between the Imam and one of his followers, often with a miraculous

⁹⁹ For example, the rescript issued to al-Bilālī to warn him not to deny the Imam was made accessible to Twelver posterity when al-Bilālī showed it to a hadith transmitter to copy, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 499.

¹⁰⁰ See for example, the rescripts of Abū Jaʿfar, dealt with in Chapter 7.

¹⁰¹ See, for example Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 482.

¹⁰² See, for example, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 500.

¹⁰³ See for example, the collections of legal and doctrinal responsa from the pre-Occultation Imams compiled by ‘Abd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī (Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 91), and later legal and doctrinal *masāʿil* works such as the various *Masāʿil* of Mufīd, such as *Ajwibat al-masāʿil al-ḥājibiyya*, also known as *al-Masāʿil al-ʿukbariyya*, (Beirut: Majmaʿ al-buḥūth al-islāmiyya, 1994).

proof that serves the purpose of proving the existence and legitimacy of the Hidden Imam. Several announce favor or disfavor directed towards particular figures in the Imami community. Many make reference to funerary procedures, which allow for the reporter to indicate both favor towards a particular deceased member of the community through the Imam's gifts, as well as the miraculous knowledge of a man's death displayed by the *nāḥiya*. There are also statements which give clear theological or legal statements which allow us to understand something of the climate of the era. These rescripts deserve to be treated in a separate category from the hadith that Abū Ja'far transmitted for the reason that they were received as different at the time, with great interest in the textuality of these statements, including their handwriting and the process of preserving them. As with any text from the protean period of the early Occultation, we must be skeptical about the historicity of these rescripts. However, they certainly display a literary nature that is notably at variance with the general oral character of many of the reports about the Hidden Imam. This does not mean that they were not forgeable, quite the contrary, but the rescripts are also often accompanied by details of transmission and handwriting that indicate that their transmitters were also attentive to questions of authenticity which help us place them close to the period to which they are ascribed.

Apart from individual requests for blessing, the rescripts have a number of major themes. In particular evidence is the regulation of the system of canonical taxation which was, after all the prerogative of the *wakīls* who took over the leadership of the community after the Imams. In addition the rescripts provide evidence for the policing of community boundaries through theological-doctrinal statements and the excommunication of particular actors who defied the attempts of the *wakīls* to forge unity in the community in their own image.

3.4.4 Secret signs

The Imam's and the Envoy's knowledge of who is to pay was developed into the oft-repeated trope of miraculous divination. There are many reports in which the true Imam is recognized by his miraculous knowledge of the exact quantities of his followers' contributions and their precise provenance, and whether they are ritually pure (*ḥalāl*) or not. This mechanism is also used to delegitimize the claim of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī's brother Ja'far 'the liar.'¹⁰⁴ In one report, a secret sign (*'alāma*) – perhaps a gesture – is mentioned by a dying *wakīl* to his son. The son is to take up the money in his father's possession and hand it over to whoever can give the sign.¹⁰⁵ If we assume there to be a system operating behind the miracle story, then we can suppose that such signs were commonplace elements of the *wikāla*-network, and that they were probably agreed in advance when bringing items to the *nāḥiya*. In a variant of the same story, the dying father tells his son to stamp the precious metals with his own stamp¹⁰⁶ – perhaps another identifying feature that was used to keep track of the provenance of contributions. In another account it is the purses that bear the seals of their owners, not the coin.¹⁰⁷ Clearly there were some formal mechanisms of identifying contributions in a material fashion, in addition to signs and gestures.

3.4.5 Stamping coins and ingots

In other accounts, there are tropes of complicated processes involving the stamping and re-casting of specie, apparently with the purpose of regulating the amount of contribution, and perhaps also for convenience of transportation and calculation, and perhaps also with other

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442; 475-6; 476-9

¹⁰⁵ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 376-77. The *wakīl* in question is Ibn Mahziyār, whose doubts we will discuss in more detail below.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 486-7.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 456-8.

motives like the concrete identification of their owners. Again, these reports are suggestive of the technical nature of the *wakīl*'s financial responsibility, both in terms of calculating complicated contributions from numerous sources, and also in terms of producing ingots and coinage suited to their purpose. Though the exact purpose of these details can sometimes escape the modern reader, the *wikāla* was obviously suffused by a culture of meticulous precision and taking personal responsibility for the items entrusted to the *wakīls* who were transporting them. Thus we have reports of money being lost on a journey, and the *wakīl* responsible making it up with their own money. In one case this addition is refused by the *nāḥiya*, and the *wakīl* is sent to search for the lost ingot, with the help of the miraculous knowledge mediated by the *nāḥiya*,¹⁰⁸ in another case, the *wakīl*'s contribution is accepted, and acknowledged by the Imam in a kind of receipt.¹⁰⁹ In all of these cases, the function of the report is to demonstrate the miraculous divination and therefore the legitimacy of the *nāḥiya*. This is, indeed, an explicit criterion for inclusion of these hadiths, as Ibn Bābūya makes clear in one of his authorial comments.¹¹⁰ However, we can also safely discern in these actions some features of the operational culture of the *wakīlate* which allowed the network to function successfully, with the trust of the *nāḥiya* and the believers. We can also assume a certain amount of affluence as being a pre-requisite to fulfill the post of *wakīl*, given that one's own gold was assumed to be necessary on some occasions, quite apart from the cost of travel itself.

There is a peculiar subset of reports that deal with unexpected transferals of funds and items to believers, who are then required to transfer these contributions to the *nāḥiya*. These

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 516-17.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 509.

¹¹⁰ "The author of this book said: The [miraculous] indication (*dalāla*) in this hadith is the knowledge of the amount which was carried to him, and the superfluity of a receipt (*qubūd*). That that could not be except through God's command." Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 502.

seem to function in the reports somehow as miraculous legitimations, but also as a means of moving items around secretly. Such mechanisms as signs, stamps, and receipts must have been part of the mechanism for ensuring safety and avoiding misappropriation in a network that must have operated under a degree of secrecy, especially considering that the financial collections of this network were in theoretical and actual competition with the ‘Abbasid claims. On the other hand, the community appears to have been small and tight enough for a certain amount of business to be done on pure recognition. We have various reports of people staying with and recognizing ‘our brethren’ (*ikhwān*)¹¹¹ and ‘our companions’ (*aṣḥāb*).¹¹² In a report mentioned above, the Baghdad *wakīl*, Ibn Mattīl, reluctantly acts as a messenger bringing items of sacral significance to Wāsiṭ. Ibn Mattīl asks a man for directions to the house of al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Qatāt al-Ṣaydalānī, the *wakīl* of the time in Wāsiṭ. It turns out that this man is that very same al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad: “And he said... “Who are you?” and I said "I am Ja‘far b. Muḥammad Ibn Mattīl. And [Ibn Mattīl] said: He knew me by my name and greeted me and I greeted him and we embraced.”¹¹³ This demonstrates the dynamics of knowledge within the community that allowed communications over distance and recognition of community members, in spite of a certain necessity for secrecy.

Clearly, though, there were good reasons for careful arrangements. During the early *ghayba* era, the loyalty of even long-standing members of the community was not assured. In

¹¹¹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 453-4. The phrase ‘my/our brethren’ (*ikhwān*) is particularly prevalent in the Nuṣayrī reports, suggesting the secretive esoteric or initiatory dimension of the early Occultation faction. See for example, Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 252, 291.

¹¹² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488-9.

¹¹³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 505.

addition, there are regular mentions of the danger of travel due to bandits and civil disturbance.¹¹⁴

3.4.6 Redistribution of money and blessings

The final element of the structuring of the *wikāla*-network to which we will give some attention is the question of how the money and contributions to the *nāḥiya* were used. On a purely pragmatic level, there were costs to the Imam, and the *nāḥiya* after him of maintaining a substantial household with numerous servants, slaves and dependents. The household of the Imam was separated from the establishment of the *nāḥiya*, for the Eleventh Imam's inheritance was divided between Ja'far 'the Liar' and the mother of al-'Askarī.¹¹⁵ This physical dislocation of the *nāḥiya*, and its removal to Baghdad, must have created an institutional dislocation, but we must nonetheless assume that the high-*wakīls* who took over leadership must have had to maintain similar establishments. Thus we might imagine the need for a bread-filled porter's house (*dār al-ḥammālīn*), and other trappings of the *wikāla*-network located at the house of one of the high-*wakīls*, or some shared headquarters, as it had been at the house of the Imam. In addition, it is likely that the regional *wakīls* themselves received some kind of remuneration that was both ritual and financially valuable, in return for their services, in addition to the financial benefit likely to have accrued from being the equivalent of bankers to the community.¹¹⁶ From the earliest period of Shi'ism, the Imams, as important men from important families, would have had to uphold the noble prerogatives of patronage. In poems praising the Imams, as for other

¹¹⁴ Banū Ḥandhala attacking the caravan, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 491. Bandits between Baghdad and Samarra, Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277.

¹¹⁵ See below, Chapter 4, and Modarressi, *Crisis*, 79.

¹¹⁶ For mention of the long-standing role of bankers in the Shi'i community, see Witold Rajkowski, "Early Shi'ism in Iraq," PhD thesis, (University of London, 1955), 604. See also Asatryan, "Bankers and Politics."

influential men, their liberality in patronage is noted.¹¹⁷ We have clear indications that the Imams and the *nāḥiya* of the early *ghayba* support believers in need of their patronage.¹¹⁸ Clearly patronage and sacral functions were closely allied.¹¹⁹

In addition to such financial needs, more symbolic gifts were made to believers, which display a sacral ritual significance.¹²⁰ In one particularly telling report, a man who is sent money and a gown (*thawb*) from the *nāḥiya* is at first outraged by this mark of condescension, saying that he is at their level (*manzila*) but then later repents and accepts it as a blessing. This suggests resistance to the *ghayba*-era *nāḥiya*'s attempts at continuation of the Imam's traditional patronage role, and the assumption of an equal rank between believers, undermining the *nāḥiya*'s assumption of the charismatic sacral function of the Imam. In another anecdote, a believer requests a dirham from money due to the Imam in order to make a ring out of it – presumably to gain some religious benefit from an object associated with the purifying presence of the Imam. However, the dirham disappears and has been found to have mysteriously returned to *nāḥiya* – suggesting the impossibility of redirecting funds due to the Imam.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ See Mohammad-Dja'far Mahdjoub, "The Evolution of Popular Eulogy of the Imams among the Shi'a" translated by John R. Perry, in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, edited by Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988): 54-79.

¹¹⁸ Thus, in one report, al-'Askarī is petitioned when a man's brother had stolen money from him to make up for his own lack, and al-'Askarī instructs the older brother to be kind, and promises himself to support the younger brother if necessary, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 517-19.

¹¹⁹ Some reports give a suggestion that traditional foci of patronage continue in the *ghayba* era, such as pilgrims on the Ḥajj. In one narrative a pilgrim sees the Imam and is told, "In Medina stick to the house of Ja'far b. Muhammad and you won't be worried by food or drink or something to cover your nakedness," Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 443-4.

¹²⁰ In one, particularly miraculous narrative, a man from Hamadān meets the Twelfth Imam in a shining palace (*qaṣr*) in the desert, then is sent on his way, miraculously transported back near Hamadān, with a purse of 40 or 50 dinars). This report is presented as the origins of the conversion to Imami Shī'ism of the Banū Rāshid, a community in Hamadān. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 453-4.

¹²¹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 505-6.

A particularly prevalent trope is that of the gift of grave goods, and funerary items such as shrouds and funerary balm, as well as the wage of grave-diggers¹²² that both indicate the ritual relationship between the *nāḥiya* and the believers, but also function in the sources as a miraculous legitimation of the *nāḥiya* through the evidence of miraculous knowledge of the time of a believer's death.¹²³ These ritual payments coexist alongside gifts of a non-financial nature that carry perhaps equal ritual weight to gifts of real value. They often are attached to miraculous narratives that aim to prove the religious legitimacy of the bestower and divine power imbued within the objects.¹²⁴ The very receipts from the *nāḥiya* clearly carry some sacral weight, as we can see from their very preservation for posterity in the sources, and the miraculous anecdotes that surround them in the sources.

3.4.7 Mechanisms of community defense, coherence and coercion

One final significant area of the functions of the *wikāla*-network in the *ghayba* era is that of the definition of the boundaries of the community through mechanisms such as disassociation or anathematization (*barā'a*) and cursing (*la'n*), through formally-issued *tawqī'* rescripts. These mechanisms were important for establishing the communities' boundaries of praxis and belief, and they are the continuation of a series of such acts in the stormy pre-*ghayba* era.¹²⁵ The *wikāla*-network is crucial in handing these down and broadcasting them to the community. The exercise of these mechanisms cannot, however be separated from the personalities at whom they were

¹²²In one report, dated to 298 AH, a believer is given 100 dirhams in number and weight, and a handkerchief (*mindīl*) to wipe sorrow from his face, and funerary balm (*ḥunūṭ*), and shrouds. The dirhams are eventually returned to the *nāḥiya*, and the funerary items predict the death of the recipient, for whom they are used, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 505. See also the previous report in the *Kamāl*, 505.

¹²³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl* 505.

¹²⁴ See, for example the two dinars sent to al-Ḥulaysī, on Ḥajj, before he became sick, and the violets (*banafsaḥ*) that are used to cure his sickness, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 493-4.

¹²⁵ See, for example, the Chapter in Ṭūsī on pre-Occultation miscreants, *Ghayba*, 218-19; and Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 365-376.

directed, and so we will discuss them in the following chapter, where they appear as significant indicators of the exercise of power and the struggle for leadership in the Imami community

3.4.8 Central versus local leadership

My focus on the events at the central nodes of the *wikāla*-network is not to deny the importance of local, regional developments in defining the character of the community overall. Clearly, for most Shi‘a, while the Imam formed the conceptual center of their religious universe, community was embodied in more intimate relations with those who lived in the same geographical area. These local structures were not merely defined by their relationship with the Imam and the *wikāla*, but also themselves brought their own conceptions of the community to bear on events at the center. This is visible even pre-*ghayba*.¹²⁶ Following the death of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the role of provincial elites in resolving the crisis appears to increase in importance. This is particularly visible in the Qummī case, where Qummī traditionists gave their imprimatur to the new order – certainly for posterity, through the transmission of traditions – but also apparently at the moment of crisis itself. Though the Imam-sanctioned functionaries of the *wikāla*-network clearly held much prestige, their role in the formation of ideology and doctrine was not univocal. There were some important scholars involved in the *wikāla*-network, but on the whole, the creators of epistemic legitimacy were the scholars who were not necessarily active political agents, but operated in parallel, or perhaps sometimes in opposition to the functionaries of the *wikāla*. The high-*wakīls* visibly courted communities of supporters, and wavering Shi‘a. We will deal with this process in more the following chapters.

¹²⁶ See, for example, the controversy over Faḍl b. Shādhān and his theory of the Imamate, Bayhom-Daou, “The Imam’s Knowledge...” See also the traditions demanding the Imam to offer proofs, by answering legal questions correctly, Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 290.

3.5 Conclusion

We have seen, then, that the *wikāla*-network during the early *ghayba* period was centered upon an institution referred to as the *nāḥiya* which combined the aura of charisma and legitimation of a hiding Imam with the *de facto* operational control of the high-*wakīls*, an oligarchic class of functionaries who had inherited their position at the head of the Imam's *wikāla*-network from pre-*ghayba* times, and continued to operate according to the same principles as best as they could.

The reports that were collected towards the end of the fourth/tenth century by Ibn Bābūya do indeed suggest of the continued operation of the *wikāla* network after the death of the Eleventh Imam, with relatively large sums continuing to be collected in the form of canonical taxes and the income from *waqf* endowments, albeit with increased difficulty in some cases, and with rescripts (*tawqī'āt*) and other documents issued to represent communication between the hiding Imam and his followers. These documents became the focus for sacral and ritual experiences, and the financial operations of the *wikāla* became one aspect of the claims for religious legitimacy, imbued as they became with rumors of the miraculous.

The operations of the network were characterized by a great degree of flexibility. Some positions were appointed, some were hereditary. Some functions, such as transporting canonical taxes to the central *nāḥiya*, went through official channels of the *wikāla*-network, but sometimes individual believers seem to have taken it upon themselves to travel great distances to bring their money to the *nāḥiya*. Patrician Imami families had an inevitable role in the *wikāla*-network, but also fairly lowly craftsmen and tradesmen, or their heirs, seem to have been significant agents in the network. At every point in the network during the Occultation era, doubt and instability posed threats to its continued integrity, and made the task of Occultation era consolidation more

difficult – from the doubting of high-*wakīls* such as Ibn Mahziyār, to the provincial believer who wanted to know the true *wakīl* was, to whom money could be safely entrusted. The significance of this doubt was not merely financial, however, but of sacral significance, for the mundane financial transactions of the *wikāla*-network were imbued with ritual importance for the purification of the individual, and the achievement of salvation.

The *wikāla*-network, then, was a crucial institution in the regulation and preservation of ritual, financial and ideological structures that allowed the community to continue with a modicum of coherency even through a period of crisis like the early Occultation era. The expectations of both those with authority, but also those who were bound together by recognition of that authority, gave the Imami community an inertia that allowed it to hold together while the intellectual class was busy with the formulation and contestation of theories of authority and legitimacy which would furnish a new basis for the community's self-understanding, and ultimately supersede the *de facto* power exercised by the high-*wakīls*. But before any theories of Imami identity could be set on a firm footing, the contestations between different political and ideological factions within the Imami community had to be resolved.

Chapter 4. Crisis in the Imams' household: the phantom pregnancy, and Ja'far 'the Liar'

4.1. Overview

The death of the Eleventh Imam in 874/260 precipitated a great crisis in the household of the Imam, which was remembered with great pain and consternation among the Shi'i community for decades to come. Initially, it was probably contained within the immediate circle of the Imams. Most of the Imami community had no direct access that would allow them to see the conflicts at the center. However, a messy inheritance dispute occurred between the mother of the Eleventh Imam, Ḥudayth, and his brother, Ja'far 'the Liar'. The inheritance of property was implicitly tied to the inheritance of the spiritual legacy of the Imams, and both the brother and the mother can be seen to have laid claim to that spiritual legacy. The inheritance dispute was an open wound at the heart of the Imamate, and the elite of the community split into factions, one of which was to become the Twelvers. Before the doctrines and institutions of the Occultation era Twelvers could develop, the conflict within the family of the Imams, and the elite of the Shi'a had to be played out. In this chapter I will address this conflict in detail. Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī depicts this faction being held together by an old guard of companions of the Eleventh Imam for the first twenty years after the Imam's death.¹

In the standard Twelver narrative, when the last visible Imam² died, the transition to the structures of authority associated with the era of Occultation (*ghayba*) was not universally accepted by the Imamis, but it is presented as having been smooth, immediate and inevitable. This narrative has also been accepted by many scholars. Since the publication of his *Crisis and*

¹ See discussion of Abū Sahl's *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, below, in Chapter 5.

² The last visible Imam before the era of the Hidden, or Occulted Imam, was the Eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī, known as al-'Askarī. See first two chapters.

Consolidation in 1993, the best recent scholarship on the Occultation doctrine, and the period in which it was developed, follows Modarressi's meticulous synthesis of the sources.³ But Modarressi glosses over the problems with the construction of authority in the earliest phase of the Occultation period:

Immediately after the abrupt death of Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī in 260/874, his close associates, headed by ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, made it public that the Imām had a son who was the legitimate successor to the Imāmate.⁴

Much of what follows in this chapter serves to question and complicate this statement. Two main assumptions here must be challenged: firstly the assumption that the concept of the Child Imam had already been developed by the time al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī died, and merely had to be announced upon his death; and secondly the idea that the *wakīl* or 'Envoy'⁵, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī stepped smoothly into the role of leadership of a pro-Occultation faction, as spokesperson for this Child Imam, without contestation, with the corollary assumption that the elite core of the community accepted his authority to act as spokesperson.

I offer a new narrative of the earliest days of the Occultation era. Instead of a smooth transition, this chapter and the following chapter chart a course through a phase of confusion; to a phase of the contestation of authority and the generation of intellectual solutions; to a phase of consolidation and canonization of the Occultation idea. In this chapter we consider the first two

³ Arjomand, for example, provides a brilliant sociological-political narrative covering broad developments in the Shiʿi community. For the earliest period of the Occultation era he relies heavily on Modarressi's construction of the facts, supplemented by Ṭūsī's *Ghayba*. For the transition of authority after the Imamate of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī see especially Said Amir Arjomand, "Crisis," 500-503; Andrew Newman, *Formative Period*, 151-2.

⁴ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 77.

⁵ As we have seen in the previous chapter, the *wakīls* were the Imam's appointed functionaries who operated his financial-sacral network, while the term *saḥr* refers to the later theological conception of a single high-*wakīl* who was the unique intermediary between the hidden Imam and his community. I use the form *wakīl*/Envoy in order to maintain the recognition of his later theological role, alongside the more historical reality that he was one among several of the Imam's trusted agents.

decades after the death of al-Ḥasan; the era of confusion, in which no consensus about the nature of authority in the Occultation era had yet been achieved. The process of canonization will be developed in the following chapter in our discussion of the rise of the *wakīls*/Envoys, the consolidation of their authority, and the crystallization of ideas that express that authority. In the first couple of decades, however, consolidation was impossible: contrary to Modarressi's suggestion that the elite of the Imami community were the calm center of the storm, in fact it was the very core of the Imami community which was most radically split into factions aligned according to the various solutions that arose to solve the crisis of the Imamate. It was the painful resolution of the initial splits in the core of the community that determined the boundaries of the possible for the subsequent consolidation and canonization of institutions. This consolidation was possible in particular following the death of the main contender for the Imamate, al-Ḥasan's brother, Ja'far 'the Liar' in 281/894-5.⁶ When the institution of the *wakīlate* eventually emerged as the dominant authority structure within the newly constituted Imami-Twelve community, it needed to operate within the previously-defined doctrinal, political and institutional parameters set by the contestation of authority that occurred during the first two decades following the death of al-'Askarī. Before we assess the rise and fall of the *wakīls* in the following chapter, then, we must, in this chapter, attempt to understand the earliest events of the *ghayba* era. While I will continue to use the words 'Occultation', and '*ghayba*' to describe this early period, it must be understood that the idea of *ghayba* had not yet been accepted, as for many Imamīs the most obvious Imam was not a hidden Child, born in secret, but the plainly visible Ja'far, brother of the Eleventh Imam, who claimed he was the next Imam.

⁶ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 83.

Before starting to investigate the complex and contradictory details of our sources, I will first present a brief narrative overview of the events of this earliest period, from the death of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the Eleventh Imam, in 260/874, up until the death of al-Ḥasan’s brother, Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ in 281/894-5, before the emergence of the authority of the *wakīls*. As soon as the Eleventh Imam died in 260/874, voices emerged to oppose the most obvious claimant to the Imamate, the Eleventh Imam’s brother, Ja‘far b. ‘Alī, known as ‘the Liar’ to Twelver posterity. While being of the right lineage, Ja‘far had quarreled bitterly with his brother al-Ḥasan over the succession to the Imamate at the time of the death of their father, the Tenth Imam ‘Alī al-Hādī. In order to stymie Ja‘far’s claim, eyewitness accounts were circulated from the inner circle of the Imam that testified to the existence of a son and successor to the Eleventh Imam. However, this Child Imam was said to have gone immediately into hiding. The claim that the Eleventh Imam had been succeeded by this hidden Child Imam appears in various conflicting versions, and the characters associated with these claims fall into three types: servants and concubines from the inner circle of the Imam; influential female relatives of the Eleventh Imam; and *wakīl* agents. These figures correspond to three channels that were touched in different ways by the sacredness of the Imam: his household; his bloodline; his sacral-financial network. The association with Imamic sacredness had a purely symbolic aspect, and it also had real political implications. All of these sectors of the Imami elite were active from the start of the contest over the succession to the Eleventh Imam. In the context of widespread perplexity, the *wakīls* were no more united on a solution to the crisis of succession than anyone else.⁷ The profusion of contradictory reports about the Child Imam points to the conclusion that the earliest prominent holders of symbolic authority after the Eleventh Imam were not initially the *wakīls*, or at least not exclusively.

⁷ In the following chapters we will present clear cases of dissent among various high-*wakīls*.

Instead, the sources preserve early reports that conflict with the canonical narrative by emphasizing the early role of the householders and the female relatives in determining the identity of the Imam as being the Hidden Child. Furthermore, the reports preserve the implicit claim that these figures were acting as *intermediaries* to the Imam, an office usually thought to be the unique function of the *wakīls*. These accounts problematize the narrative of the immediate establishment of the intermediary authority of the *wakīls*, and yet the accounts could not be purged because they had already established their centrality within the evidentiary structures for the existence of the Child Imam. The fact, then, that these accounts contradict the canonical narrative, but still remain central, suggest that they must both be early, and central to the early debates of the Occultation faction, predating the rise of the *wakīls* to a position of pre-eminent authority.

In a careful reading of these reports, a number of early events emerge as flashpoints that became central to the political maneuvers and intellectual debates over the crisis of succession. Though Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, as the closest male kin to the dead Imam, had a good claim to succeed to the Imamate, he was outmaneuvered in a series of events through which the legacy of the Eleventh Imam was contested. In the first twenty-four hours after the death of his brother, Ja‘far missed the opportunity to wash his brother’s corpse or pray over his body – acts which were symbolically important in signaling succession to the late Imam’s legacy. The next key event for the contestation of the Imam’s legacy was the dispute that arose over his inheritance. Ja‘far was foiled in his attempt to establish control over his brother’s house and possessions first by physical force, and then by legal means. In opposition to Ja‘far, al-Ḥasan’s mother, Ḥudayth, laid claim both to the Imam’s house and his physical property – both of which placed her in a position of symbolic authority with regards to the Imam’s legacy. The dispute over the

inheritance also provided the background for the first public emergence of the idea of the Child Imam, when one of al-Ḥasan's concubines was pregnant, and, until the claim could be disproven, there was a delay in the division of the inheritance. Although the concubine's pregnancy was proved to be a phantom through careful 'Abbasid surveillance, hopes and claims continued to be generated around the figure of the concubine, known variously as Ṣaqīl or Narjis, and these names were later incorporated into the canonical Twelver narrative as the names of the mother of the Hidden Imam, though, it was later claimed, the Child Imam had been born *before* the death of al-Ḥasan, not after.

The battle over the inheritance, then, dragged on, perhaps until 262/875-6, two years later. Al-Ḥasan's mother, Ḥudayth, initially succeeded in establishing her claim to be legatee for at least part of the inheritance, after which the inheritance was divided between her and Ja'far, rather than Ja'far inheriting it outright. Ḥudayth's twin claim to the physical inheritance of the Imam and her role as spiritual intermediary to the Child Imam was encapsulated in her appearance in the sources as a 'legatee' (*waṣī*), which suggested that she should inherit the house and property of the Imam, but also that the spiritual legacy was passed in safekeeping to her until she could pass it on to the Imam. Operating with the legitimating story of the Child Imam, Ḥudayth, supported by al-Ḥasan's paternal aunt, Ḥakīma/Khadīja, established herself as a spokesperson for the Imam's spiritual legacy. She appears to have continued until her death to be the unique intermediary for the Child Imam, and may have issued statements on his behalf.

After Ḥudayth's death, Ja'far's support did continue among some Imamis well into the fourth/tenth century, in particular among those who had been dissatisfied with the Imamate of his brother. He was, however, unable to mount an enduringly successful bid for the Imamate. Ultimately Ja'far's failure to lay claim to the various institutions of the Imamate was due to a

number of factors: his feud with his brother al-Ḥasan during his lifetime; the subsequent hostility of those sectors of the Imami elite who had been most loyal to al-Ḥasan; his inability to cobble together a viable coalition from amongst the fragmented groups of the Imami community; and the increasing difficulty for any mortal candidate for the Imamate to live up to the standards of knowledge set by the hadith scholars whose prerogative it had become to test the Imams against the preserved knowledge of earlier Imams.

Table 7: The major actors in the earliest phase of the Occultation

‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Hādī	The Tenth Imam (d.254-5/868-9)
Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad	Al-Hādī’s eldest son, designated as Imam but died (251-2/865-6) during his father’s lifetime
Al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-‘Askarī	Al-Hādī’s middle son, the Eleventh Imam (d. 260/874)
Ja‘far b. ‘Alī ‘the Liar’	Al-Hādī’s youngest son, claimed to be the Imam after al-Ḥasan’s death (d. 281/894-5)
Fāris b. Ḥātim b. Māhūya al-Qazwīnī	<i>Wakīl</i> agent under al-Hādī. Turned renegade and was assassinated at al-Hādī’s orders. His followers supported the Imamate of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad, and later Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ (d. sometime between 250/ 864 and 255/869)
Ḥudayth	The mother of the Eleventh Imam. Claimed to be legatee (<i>waṣī</i>) of the Eleventh Imam’s inheritance in opposition to Ja‘far’s claim. Representative of

the spiritual legacy of the Eleventh Imam after his death. (d. between 262/876 and 281/895)

Ḥakīma a.k.a. Khadīja

The aunt of the Eleventh Imam, and supporter of Ḥudayth

Saqīl a.k.a. Narjis

A concubine of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. Claimed to be pregnant with his child after his death, but claim was falsified. Nonetheless, known to posterity as the mother of the Twelfth Imam.

Abū ‘Īsā b. al-Mutawakkil

Brother of the Caliph al-Mu‘tamid. Prayed over the corpse of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī

Supporting characters

‘Alī b. al-Ṭāḥī al-Khazzāz

A Kufan Faṭḥite theologian and supporter of Ja‘far in association with the sister of Fāris.

Ibn Nuṣayr (Abū Shu‘ayb Muḥammad
Ibn Nuṣayr al-Namīrī)

Regarded by Nuṣayrīs to have been the ‘*bāb*’ or intermediary for the Tenth and Eleventh Imams (probably d. around 260/784)

‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī, sometimes
known as Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr

The first Envoy

Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān b.
Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī.

The second Envoy, son of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd (d. 305/917)

Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Thawāba	Supporter of the Imamate of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’. Later denounced him in favor of the Child Imam.
Abū ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Jamāl	Supporter of the Imamate of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’. Later denounced him in favor of the Child Imam.
‘Ubayd ‘Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān	Vizier to the ‘Abbasid Caliph al-Mu‘tamid, from 256/869-70 until he died in 263/877.
Aḥmad b. ‘Ubayd ‘Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān	Son of ‘Ubayd ‘Allāh b. Yaḥyā. ‘Abbasid tax agent in Qumm. Related to Qummī traditionists a key anecdote regarding the aftermath of al-Ḥasan’s death.
Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī	Prominent Qummī associate of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. Member of a delegation to bring canonical taxes to Samarra which rejected Ja‘far as the Imam.

4.2. The Imam who might have been: Ja‘far ‘the Liar’

A key question that has scarcely been asked by existing scholarship on this period is the following: why was the Imamate of a living, visible candidate, Ja‘far b. ‘Alī, rejected in favor of the absent Child Imam? The answer lies, in part, in the background to Ja‘far’s claim, and the political and doctrinal foundations upon which this claim was based. The crisis of succession that followed the death of the Eleventh Imam was not unprecedented. Indeed, it was really only the continuation of a crisis that had been developing since the Imamate of the Tenth Imam, ‘Alī al-Hādī. Al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī had not been the original candidate for Eleventh Imam. The eldest son of the Tenth Imam was Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad and he had been designated by al-Hādī, but had

then died during al-Hādī's lifetime.⁸ Al-Hādī duly designated al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, but his Imamate was dogged by the problems created by this hiccup in succession, which suggested to some that perhaps God had not planned for al-Ḥasan to be Imam,⁹ and for others merely presented a good opportunity to express their dissatisfaction. Some rejected al-Ḥasan in favor of his younger brother, Ja‘far ‘the Liar’. Among those who rejected al-Ḥasan, some believed that al-Hādī had designated Ja‘far directly, and that his designation of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad was an instance of *taqiyya* to protect Ja‘far.¹⁰ Others believed that Ja‘far inherited the Imamate not directly from his father, but by way of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad. Others continued to be attached to the idea of the Imamate of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad to the extent that they even claimed that he had gone into *ghayba* and was the messianic *mahdī*.¹¹ In order to repair the damage created by Ja‘far's claim to the Imamate, reports from the mouth of al-Hādī were circulated condemning Ja‘far.¹² During the lifetime of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, his *wakīls* and other supporters must have engaged in a concerted propaganda effort to spread these reports and undermine Ja‘far's support. One of the influential men who had favored Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad during the Imamate of al-Hādī was the regional *wakīl* Fāris b. Ḥātim b. Māhūya who was based in Samarra and had collected canonical taxes for the Tenth Imam from the community in the *Jibāl*; the central and

⁸ This was a series of events strikingly similar to the crisis surrounding the early death of Ja‘far al-Šādiq's son and designated heir, Ismā‘īl, which had created great rifts in the community, ultimately furnishing the claims of the Ismailis. See Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shī‘a*, edited by Hellmut Ritter (Istanbul: Maṭba‘at al-dawla li-jam‘iyat al-mustashriqīn al-almānīya, 1931), 57-67. Modarressi, *Crisis*, 54-60.

⁹ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 65-66.

¹⁰ As Nawbakhtī describes it: “And the rest of the partisans of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad [al-Hādī] declared for the Imamate of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī and established the Imamate for him by means of the testament [*waṣīyya*] of his father... except for a few, and they leant towards his brother, Ja‘far b. ‘Alī, and they said, “His father appointed him as successor (*awṣā ilayhi*) after the death of Muḥammad and he made his Imamate obligatory, and made his Imamate (*amr*, literally his ‘affair’) manifest. And they denied the Imamate of his brother Muḥammad, saying, “[Al-Hādī] only did that [designated Muḥammad] in order to hide him [*ittiqā’an ‘alayhi*] and protect him, but the Imam in reality was Ja‘far b. ‘Alī.” Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 79.

¹¹ Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qummī, edited by Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr, (Tehran: Mu‘assasa-i maṭbū‘āt-i ‘aṭā’ī, [1963]), 101.

¹² See, for example Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 292.

western parts of Iran. Fāris had quarreled with another *wakīl* about jurisdiction over the *Jibāl*. Al-Hādī favored Fāris's rival in the dispute, and Fāris responded by appropriating funds due to the Imam. Al-Hādī first anathematized and then ordered the assassination of Fāris.¹³ Fāris's followers later became important supporters of Ja'far.

What exactly Fāris and his followers believed at different phases during the six unsettled years of al-Ḥasan's Imamate is the subject of a certain amount of variance in our sources. Nawbakhtī and Khaṣībī both agree that the dissenters from al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī following the death of al-Hādī declared for Ja'far instead of al-Ḥasan.¹⁴ However, Khaṣībī also cites an intriguing report in which Fāris was said to have claimed to be the *bāb* of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad, after which Ja'far 'the Liar' claimed to be the *bāb* after Fāris.¹⁵ We cannot credit the idea that Ja'far, a man of Imamic blood, would have claimed to be the *bāb* after Fāris, given the strength of his own claim to be an Imam in his own right. However, the report reflects the belief systems of a portion of Ja'far's followers, in their efforts to fit Ja'far's claim into a pantheon in keeping with their own distinctive sense of history and cosmology. This can be seen as parallel to the Nuṣayrī process of harmonizing the historical developments within the family of the Imams with their own distinctive cosmology, though the Nuṣayrīs acknowledged the Child Imam, instead of Ja'far. It is relevant that this report is preserved by a Nuṣayrī author, as the process of pantheon-making was particularly important for Nuṣayrīs.¹⁶ Having accepted Fāris as

¹³ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 371-374. Modarressi, *Crisis*, 71-3.

¹⁴ See the quotation from Nawbakhtī in the note above. Khaṣībī reports the following: "And the Shī'a (all of the guided ones) were unanimous in their consensus over Abū Muḥammad after his father, all except the companions of Fāris b. Māhūya [Fāris b. Ḥātim] for they declared for the Imamate of Ja'far b. 'Alī al-'Askarī." Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 291.

¹⁵ See Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 291-2, and below.

¹⁶ A similar process seems to have occurred in the case of the spiritual authority of Ḥudayth and her adoption into a proto-Nuṣayrī pantheon presented in a report also in the Nuṣayrī *Hidāya*. See below in the section on Ḥudayth's claim to be intermediary.

the *bāb* of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad, his followers then had to discover an appropriate mechanism to transfer spiritual authority to Ja‘far. An alternative was the claim that a servant called Nafīs was the legatee of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad, and passed the Imamate on to Ja‘far.¹⁷

Had the Eleventh Imam lived, it is likely he could have neutralized the threat from dissenting groups like the followers of Fāris. But he died, apparently with no offspring, after a short six years of Imamate, leaving unfinished the work of re-focusing upon his own person the charismatic contract made between his forefathers and the Imami community, and the followers of Ja‘far still prominent. After his death, the community was faced with the perplexing choice between the Imamate of Ja‘far, the hated brother of the widely-accepted Eleventh Imam, or the prospect of a world without an Imam – an idea that undermined the metaphysical foundations of their universe. Given his quarrel with his brother over who should succeed to the Imamate during his lifetime, it is no surprise that Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ encountered opposition from the household of the Imam and his relations over the inheritance and his claim upon the Imamate, after al-Ḥasan’s death. Nor is it unusual that the core of the Imami elite should be riven by the question of succession. While the supporters of al-Ḥasan must have felt that professing allegiance to Ja‘far would be a violation of al-Ḥasan’s memory, on the other hand, no alternative candidate presented himself. Even among partisan Twelver accounts of the aftermath of al-Ḥasan’s death, there are some reports that suggest that the idea of Ja‘far’s succession to the Imamate was widely accepted as inevitable, at least initially. The following statement is quoted from Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*. It depicts the arrival in Samarra of a messenger employed by Eleventh Imam, soon after his master’s death:

¹⁷ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 88-9.

قال أبو الأديان : وإذا أنا بجعفر بن علي أخيه بباب الدار والشيعية من حوله يعزونه ويهنونه ، فقلت في نفسي : إن يكن هذا الامام فقد بطلت الإمامة ، لأنني كنت أعرفه يشرب النبيذ ويقامر في الجوسق ويلعب بالطنبور

Abū al-Adyān said: ... I was with Ja‘far b. ‘Alī [‘the Liar’] his brother, at the door of the house, and the Shi‘a were around him, offering their condolences and congratulating him (*yu‘zawnahuwa yuhanni‘ūnahu*). I said to myself, “if this is the Imam, then the Imamate is finished (*bāṭil*)” because I know that he drinks date wine and gambles at the palace and plays the *ṭanbūr*.”¹⁸

This account depicts a situation in which the majority of the Imamis seem to have accepted Ja‘far as the next Imam. The narrator rejects Ja‘far as a candidate on moral grounds. Many such reports stress the immorality of Ja‘far, and it is difficult to determine whether this is mere polemic or a substantive complaint. What is clear from the heresiographical literature, however, is that the public feud between al-Ḥasan and Ja‘far presented the gravest problems for Ja‘far’s candidacy.¹⁹ It seemed impossible that both could be Imams, given that they were at loggerheads, for the Imams were understood to embody the eternal truth of God, within which there could be no contradiction. Those who were able to accept Ja‘far’s Imamate, therefore, had to be either pragmatists, or those whose hermeneutical approach to events within the Imamate was sufficiently flexible to reinterpret the exterior appearance of events according to their conviction of the underlying truth of the situation.²⁰ The inevitability of some Imamis’ initial recognition of Ja‘far as Imam²¹ has sometimes been obscured by the intensity of later Twelver polemic against

¹⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 223-224.

¹⁹ This point is employed in the later theological literature that developed to counter Ja‘far’s claim. See for example, Ibn Qiba’s debate with the Zaydites, Modarressi, *Crisis*, 218.

²⁰ See Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 82, and below.

²¹ Modarressi suggests that Ja‘far might have been accepted by the majority of Imamis, *Crisis*, 81.

Ja‘far, which gathered steam in the next few decades, and continued for well over a century.²² But amongst the splinter groups that emerged following the death of al-‘Askarī, pro-Ja‘far groups feature strongly. The apparent fact that Ja‘far was the only viable visible, living candidate for the Imamate²³ must have been a persuasive factor for many of those followers of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī who believed that there must always be an Imam present in the world. Even some of the most influential high-*wakīls* loyal to al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī appear to have initially accepted the succession of Ja‘far as inevitable in the initial days after the Eleventh Imam’s death,²⁴ though this would have been impossible for those who were too deeply implicated in the conflict with Ja‘far and Fāris. Al-‘Amrī, for example, is reported to have been explicitly involved with the anathema against Fāris at the time of al-Ḥādī.²⁵ For his part, whatever the beliefs of his followers, Ja‘far explicitly claimed the Imamate for himself. But he appears to have found it difficult to establish a consensus regarding the means by which his legitimate candidacy was to be established. In the Twelver canonical sources, as also in the Nuṣayrī reports cited by Khaṣībī which are very similar in content, we commonly encounter the *topos* of perplexed Imamis going to Samarra and finding Ja‘far claiming to be the successor to the Eleventh Imam.²⁶ As one would

²² Modarressi, *Crisis*, 82-86.

²³ No other viable candidate seems to have been advanced from the the Imamic lineage. It is true that one of Nawbakhtī’s sects did claim that Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad was the Imam, and he had a son who was the *qā‘im*, and the *mahdī*. Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 84. However, this group does not appear otherwise in the historical record, and no polemics were produced against this group in the Twelver tradition, suggesting that either it was a purely intellectual claim, with no sociological dimension, or that any group subscribing to this theory was insignificant and short-lived.

²⁴ For example, in a report from Abū al-Adyān (also cited above), the high-*wakīl* Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshā’ is portrayed in one report as siding initially with Ja‘far against the Child Imam. Upon the sudden appearance of the Child Imam at the funeral of al-‘Askarī Ḥājiz says to Ja‘far, “Oh my Lord (*sayyid*) who is the boy so that we may set up proof against him (*li-nuqīma al-hujja ‘alayhi*).” Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475-6. This report is somewhat unreliable, given the prominent place it gives to the miraculous appearance of the Child Imam, but it seems unlikely that a report would fabricate a *wakīl*’s acceptance of the hated Ja‘far, if it had not, in fact been a real phenomenon. There is also the possibility, of course, that it might reflect some other influences, such as an inter-*wakīl* polemic aimed at undermining the figure of the powerful Ḥājiz. See following chapter.

²⁵ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 373.

²⁶ See below.

expect, the Nuṣayrī and Twelver accounts always portray those who claim the Imamate for Ja‘far as mad and bad. And yet, one can discover certain useful details about the pro-Ja‘far movement. It was crippled by disunity – the Achilles’ heel of many Imami movements before it, and much of this disunity seemed to stem from a confusion about the way Ja‘far had succeeded to the Imamate, with three distinct positions being contested: that he had been designated Imam by his father, ‘Alī al-Hādī; or by his eldest brother Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad, or by al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. However, this was by no means unprecedented. When I describe the Imami community before the Occultation as intrinsically fissiparous,²⁷ it is because disunity between the varied demographics of the Imami community was a perennial problem. Almost every new Imam had to face this problem, and the moment of succession required careful political and doctrinal maneuvering to create a symbolic unity between disparate groups. As leaders of an often persecuted minority, the Imams had little recourse to any coercive means to ensure orthodoxy, beyond excommunication, but this was only useful once a clear consensus upon the Imam had been established. Ja‘far’s followers are best understood as a number of different constituencies that Ja‘far would have to unite if he was to have any chance of succeeding in his claim upon the Imamate. The followers of Fāris b. Ḥātim who gave their backing to Ja‘far were presumably principally located both in Iran; in the Jibāl, where Fāris had collected canonical taxes, but also in Iraq, especially in Kufa.²⁸ Among the thirteen splinter groups named by Nawbakhtī as having resulted from the crisis of succession after the death of al-‘Askarī, four of them were supporters of Ja‘far, though two of these appear to have had near-identical theoretical positions.

The positions of Ja‘far’s supporters can be summarized as follows:

²⁷ See Chapter 2.

²⁸ Khaṣībī carries a report in which two followers of Ja‘far had to escape to Kufa to avoid the displeasure of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, where they stayed until that Imam died. Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 291. Modarressi, *Crisis*, 75.

Ja‘far was Imam designated by al-Ḥasan (two distinct groups). Some believed that al-Ḥasan passed the Imamate on to Ja‘far, and that any apparent bad blood between them was mere show.²⁹ Some of these drew support for their position from the arguments of the *Faṭḥiyya* sect which believed that succession between brothers was not impossible. The Faṭḥite position had first developed as a response to the crisis after the death of the Sixth Imam, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, when his son ‘Abd Allāh al-Aṭṭah had succeeded him, but died soon after, leaving the Imamate to his brother, Mūsā al-Kāẓim. In contrast to followers of the canonical line of Imams, who ultimately excluded ‘Abd Allāh al-Aṭṭah from the canonical list of Imams, the Faṭḥite splinter group, which was particularly strong in Kufa, had continued to include ‘Abd Allāh al-Aṭṭah within their line of Imams. Apart from the inclusion of ‘Abd Allāh al-Aṭṭah, the Faṭḥites did in practice follow the same Imams as the rest of Imamīs. However, the fact that they allowed for the succession between brothers made their doctrines particularly relevant to the present crisis. The key figure among the Faṭḥites who turned his group’s doctrinal position into an argument in favor of Ja‘far was ‘Alī b. al-Ṭāḥī al-Khazzāz, a *mutakallim*, and he proselytized on Ja‘far’s behalf.³⁰ Nawbakhtī tells us that he was aided in this by the sister of al-Fāris b. Ḥātim b. Māhūya, though this is peculiar given that she did not believe in the Imamate of al-Ḥasan at all, and therefore had no doctrinal reason to ally herself to a Faṭḥite. Clearly, political considerations sometimes trumped doctrinal similarity, in spite of the heresiographical tendency to categorize according to doctrine.

There was yet another Faṭḥite group that Nawbakhtī describes as being a distinct group, though they had almost identical beliefs about the succession. In contrast to the followers of ‘Alī

²⁹ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 81-2. Jawād Mashkūr, “An-Nawbaḥṭi. Les sectes sī‘ites,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, 153, No. 1 (1958): 65-66.

³⁰ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 82.

b. al-Ṭāḥī al-Khazzāz and the sister of Fāris b. Ḥātim, Nawbakhtī seems to rather approve of this latter group of Faḥites, calling them “the jurists (*fuqahā*) from amongst the [Faḥites]; a pious and worshipful people,” including ‘Abd Allāh b. Bukayr b. A‘yun, and his associates.³¹

While in the realm of abstract theory, these two groups had a lot in common, both consisting of Faḥite supporters of Ja‘far, Nawbakhtī provided separate entries for them, suggesting that they were in fact distinctive constituencies. The followers of Fāris b. Ḥātim appear to have been of a, ‘extremist’ or *ghulāt* nature³² that set them apart from these ‘pure Faḥites’ (*al-faḥiyya al-khulus*).³³ Though Nawbakhtī does not go into details, it appears from reports about the Ja‘farites cited by Khaṣībī that the followers of Fāris held unorthodox views about the structure of Imamate, for they believed that Ja‘far was initially a *bāb* and then later became Imam.³⁴

Ja‘far was Imam, designated by his father, ‘Alī al-Hādī, not by al-Ḥasan. This group left al-Ḥasan out of the line of Imams altogether, arguing that he must have been an imposter, for the Imamate cannot pass between two brothers, and an Imam must always leave a successor after him. This position was possible given the brevity and instability of al-Ḥasan’s Imamate.

Ja‘far was Imam, designated by his brother Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad who died during the lifetime of ‘Alī al-Hādī. In Nawbakhtī’s formulation, this group centered itself upon the claim that a trusted young servant-boy (*ghulām*), Nafīs, had been instrumental in the designation, acting as a temporary legatee (*waṣī*)³⁵ and taking all the sacred knowledge and objects of the

³¹ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 93.

³² Kashshī deals with Fāris in the section of the *ghulāt* from the time of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, applying words like ‘liar’ (*kādhīb*) and ‘perverted’ (*munḥarif*) to him; *Rijāl*, 371-4.

³³ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 93-4.

³⁴ See Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 291-2, for the claims about Ja‘far being the *bāb* who succeeded Fāris as *bāb*; and the discussion of this report, below.

³⁵ There is a similarity with this claim and the claims that al-Ḥasan’s mother, Ḥudayth made regarding her role as the transmitter of spiritual authority. See below.

Imam from Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad to Ja‘far.³⁶ Nawbakhtī mentions that this group claimed that al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī was an infidel (*kāfir*), while making *ghulāt* claims regarding Ja‘far, claiming him to be the Qā‘im, and preferring him to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. Ultimately, Nafīs was taken one night and thrown into a pool in a house and drowned.³⁷ It is also very likely that some of those who held this position did not specifically tie their claims to the role of Nafīs as temporary legate. For example, as we have noted above, the sister of Fāris b. Ḥātim rejected al-Ḥasan’s Imamate, but nonetheless allied herself to the Faḥrite ‘Alī b. al-Ṭāḥī al-Khazzāz.

4.3. Key manoeuvres after the death of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī

4.3.1. The first twenty-four hours: washing and praying over the corpse

When an Imam died, it was important for the succession that his death should be positively confirmed. A number of key rituals are associated with the positive determination of the death of the former Imam, and the recognition of his successor – including the washing of the corpse, the praying over his body, and showing his face to those gathered at the funeral. Kulaynī devotes a chapter of his *Kāfī* comprising of hadith establishing that an Imam’s corpse must be washed only by an Imam.³⁸ These ritual actions had been established as pivotal points of contention in context of polemics surrounding earlier succession disputes. The question of proving that the Imam had died was particularly significant in the case of the Seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāzīm. The ambiguity of Mūsā’s death in prison had proven intensely divisive, contributing to the formation of the *wāqifiyya* (or *wāqifa*) faction that believed Mūsā had gone into occultation – perhaps the most important precedent for the Occultation of the Twelfth

³⁶ See below for the topos of a servant-intermediary to the Imam repeated in the Twelver literature surrounding the figure of ‘Aqīd/Badr.

³⁷ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 88-9.

³⁸ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:384-5.

Imam.³⁹ The *wāqifiyya* used Mūsā’s death in prison as a means of attacking Mūsā’s successor, ‘Alī al-Riḍā, on the grounds that neither had he washed his father’s body, nor had he been present at his funeral procession.⁴⁰ Such crises and divisions increasingly sensitized the Imami community to the performance of protocols following the death of an Imam. Because of the personal nature of these rituals, insiders to the household of the Imam naturally assumed a privileged position in determining how they were carried out. These insiders included figures like women and servants who do not otherwise figure significantly in historical narratives of the period. The privileged position of the Imam’s inner circle became of pivotal importance in the transition to the *ghayba* era, in the interlude before the authority of the *wakīls* was clearly established.

Following the death of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, such rituals once again had significant implications for determining his successor: in particular the washing of and the praying over the corpse of the Imam. Anyone who performed either of these acts would strengthen his or her claim to determine the succession to the institution of the Imamate. While the historicity of any detail within these accounts is difficult to verify, overall they do demonstrate a dynamic that was to prove very significant in determining the outcome of the crisis of succession: the nature and interpretation of events was determined with reference to actors within the inner circle of the Imam’s household who could plausibly have witnessed the events.

³⁹ Buyukkara, “Schism,” 82-6. See Klemm, “*Sufarā’*,” 135-136 for the precedence set by the *wāqifa* for the development of *ghayba* literature. Arjomand refers to the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam as a ‘neo-Waqifite’ theory, “Imam *Absconditus*,” 1-5.

⁴⁰ “The Wāqifis attacked al-Rida in different ways. They alleged that due to the fact that al-Rida had not been able to be present in the funeral procession of his father, he must not have been an Imam, because a Shi‘i tradition considered that “the body of the dead Imam could not be washed by anyone except the next Imam”. Buyukkara, 90-1. For the traditions regarding the washing of the dead Imam, see also Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 1: 384-5.

It is likely that, in breach of established precedent, the Imam was washed, not by another Imam, but by a servant or concubine from the Imam's household. Certainly, the inner circle of the Imam's household are depicted as being immediately involved in determining the first response to the Imam's death, and, as we will see, this inner circle was not insulated from the outside world, but was rather interconnected with the world of Samarra politics through alliances, and through the intervention and surveillance of the authorities who attempted to project their authority into the Imam's household. One account of the ritual actions following the death of the Eleventh Imam is as follows:

عن محمد بن الحسين بن عباد أنه قال : مات أبو محمد الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام يوم جمعة مع صلاة الغداة ، وكان في تلك الليلة قد كتب بيده كتبا كثيرة إلى المدينة ، وذلك في شهر ربيع الأول لثمان خلون منه سنة ستين ومائتين من الهجرة ، ولم يحضر في ذلك الوقت إلا صقيل الجارية ، و عقيد الخادم ومن علم الله عز وجل غيرهما ، قال عقيد : فدعا بماء قد أغلي بالمصطكي فجئنا به إليه فقال : أبدء بالصلاة هيئوني فجئنا به وبسطنا في حجره المنديل فأخذ من صقيل الماء فغسل به وجهه وذراعيه مرة مرة ومسح على رأسه وقدميه مسحاً وصلي صلاة الصبح على فراشه وأخذ القدح ليشرّب فأقبل القدح يضرب ثناياه و يده ترتعد فأخذت صقيل القدح من يده . ومضى من ساعته صلوات الله عليه ودفن في داره بسر من رأى إلى جانب أبيه صلوات الله عليهما

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Abbād said: Abū Muḥammad b. ‘Alī [al-‘Askarī] died on Friday at the Morning Prayer. That night he had written many letters to Medina⁴¹ with his own hand, and that was eight days before the month of *Rabī‘ al-awwal*, 260. No one was present at that time except Ṣaqīl the Concubine (*al-jāriya*) and ‘Aqīd the Eunuch (*al-khādim*) and God knows who else.⁴²

⁴¹ This should perhaps be understood with reference to Khadīja/Ḥakīma's claim that the Imam had provided evidence of his son's existence by writing to her. See below.

⁴² Presumably there may have been other anonymous servants present.

‘Aqīd said: Then [the Imam] called for water boiled with mastic, and we brought it to him, and he said, “I will start to pray. Prepare me (*hayyi ’ūnī!*)” And we came to him, and spread out the cloth in his room and he took the water from Ṣaqīl and washed his face and his arms once each. Then he wiped his head and his feet and prayed the morning prayer upon his rug. He took the cup (*qadah*) to drink, clashing the cup against his middle incisor tooth, his hand trembling, and Ṣaqīl took the cup from his hand. [So, the Imam] passed away at his appointed time, (may God's prayers be upon him). He was buried in his house in Samarra at the side of his father (may God's prayers be upon both of them)...⁴³

Here, the Imam, miraculously aware of his own coming demise, washes himself before his death, thereby fulfilling the precedents that dictated that an Imam must only be washed by an Imam. The details of who actually washed the corpse of al-Ḥasan were perhaps inconvenient, and so were replaced by a miracle story. In washing himself, the Imam is helped by ‘Aqīd, his servant, and Ṣaqīl, his concubine.⁴⁴ It is very likely, that it was indeed a servant or a concubine or other household insider who washed the Imam’s body, and so the details regarding ‘Aqīd the Servant and Ṣaqīl the Concubine may not be arbitrary. These names, moreover, are not purely anonymous actors, in contrast to other servants who appear as characters in our sources. Instead, their names recur with some regularity, suggesting that an alliance between a servant and a concubine of al-Ḥasan did take a prominent role in his legacy.⁴⁵ There is at least one other report in which ‘Aqīd the Eunuch is depicted as being associated with the funerary rituals for al-

⁴³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473-4.

⁴⁴ Ṣaqīl is one of the names credited with being the mother of the Twelfth Imam. ‘Aqīd al-Khādim is one transmitters who report the birth of the Twelfth Imam. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 474-5.

⁴⁵ We will deal with the conception of the concubine-servant alliance in greater detail below.

Ḥasan.⁴⁶ It is impossible to make any firm conclusions about the historicity of the activities of ‘Aqīd the Servant and Ṣaqīl the Concubine. However, as we will see below, there is very clear evidence that the servant-concubine alliance did become, in some Imami circles, a central axis amongst the pantheon of figures associated with the Child Imam.

The next, and more public display of control over the legacy of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī was the funeral prayer over the deceased. Again, because of the political-religious symbolism of this act, the accounts are suffused with implicit polemic, but it seems incontestable that when al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī died, it was not a close family member, but Abū ‘Īsā Ibn al-Mutawakkil, the brother of the reigning Caliph, al-Mu‘tamid, who prayed over the corpse, perhaps after having washed it. Al-Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya* presents an intriguing account in which washing and praying over the corpse of the Eleventh Imam is described in terms of explicit political symbolism for the ‘Abbasid s:

حدثني أحمد بن مطهر صاحب عبد الصمد بن موسى انه كان بائنا عند عبد الصمد في الليلة التي توفي بها أبو محمد (عليه السلام) فإنه دخل أحمد بن مطهر على عبد الصمد بن موسى فأخبره بوفاة أبي محمد فركب عبد الصمد إلى الوزير وأخبره بذلك فركب الوزير وعبد الصمد بن موسى بن بقاء إلى المعتمد وأخبراه بوفاة أبي محمد (عليه السلام) فأمر المعتمد أخاه بالركوب والوزير وعبد الصمد إلى دار أبي محمد حتى ينظروا إليه ويكشفوا عن وجهه ويغسلوه ويكفونه ويصلوا عليه ويدفنوه مع أبيه (عليه السلام) وينظروا من خلف ويرجعوا إليه بالخبر وتقدم إلى سائر الخاصة والعامة والدون ان يحضروا الصلاة عليه ففعل أبو عيسى والوزير وعبد الصمد جميع ما أمروا به ونظروا إلى من في الدار وانصرفوا إلى المعتمد فقال المعتمد لأخيه أبي عيسى ابشر انك ستلي الخلافة لان أخانا المعزز لما توفي أبو الحسن علي ابن محمد فخرجت وصليت وصلى بصلاتنا في الدار لأنه كان التكبير يصل

⁴⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475-6.

فلما دفنا أبا الحسن (عليه السلام) ورجعت قال ابشر يا احمد فإنك صليت على أبي الحسن وأنت تجازى بالخلافة بصلاتك عليه وأنت يا أبا عيسى قد صليت على أبي الحسن وأرجو ان تجازى بالخلافة مثلي.

Aḥmad b. Muṭahhar, the associate of ‘Abd al-Ṣamad b. Mūsā⁴⁷ said that he had been staying the night with ‘Abd al-Ṣamad on the night in which Abū Muḥammad [al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī] died, and that Aḥmad b. Muṭahhar entered into the presence of ‘Abd al-Ṣamad b. Mūsā and informed him of the death of Abū Muḥammad [al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī]. Then ‘Abd al-Ṣamad rode to the Vizier [‘Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān] and informed him of this. The Vizier rode with ‘Abd al-Ṣamad b. Mūsā b. Baqā’ to al-Mu‘tamid [the Caliph], and they both informed him of the death of Abū Muḥammad. Al-Mu‘tamid ordered his brother to ride with the Vizier and ‘Abd al-Ṣamad to the house of Abū Muḥammad in order to look at him, uncover his face, wash him, enshroud him, pray over him and bury him with his father, and that they should then look for the one who was left behind as offspring (*yanzurū man khullifa*), and return to [the Caliph] with the story and then approach (*yataqaddamū*) the rest of the elite, the general people, and the lowly (*dūn*) in order that they should attend the prayers for him.

And Abū ‘Īsā [b. al-Mutawakkil] and the Vizier and ‘Abd al-Ṣamad did everything [the Caliph] ordered them to do, and they looked at who was in the house (*dār*) and they returned to al-Mu‘tamid and al-Mu‘tamid said to his brother, Abū ‘Īsā, “I prophesy good news (*ubashshir*) that you will succeed to the Caliphate, because when Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad [al-Hādī] died, I went out and prayed [over al-Hādī] together with [al-Mu‘tazz] in [al-Hādī’s] house... And when we had buried Abū al-Ḥasan

⁴⁷ This is perhaps the ‘Abbāsīd and governor of Mecca, who was the leader of the pilgrimage in 243, 244 and 249. See Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, english translation, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 34:147-8, and 35:14.

and I had returned, [al-Mu‘tazz] said “I prophesy good news, Aḥmad: you prayed over Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī]⁴⁸ so you will be rewarded with the Caliphate for your prayers over him.” And you, Abū ‘Īsā have prayed over [Abū Muḥammad al-‘Askarī],⁴⁹ and I hope that you will be rewarded with the Caliphate as I was.”⁵⁰

The Caliph sends his brother to pray over the deceased Imam, perhaps as a mark of respect, but also, apparently, as a strategic intervention into the family politics of one of the most important ‘Alid lineages. At a time when ‘Abbasid legitimacy was increasingly problematic, and succession to the Caliphate was regularly decided through palace coup, this account suggests that there might have been a continued interest in allying the spiritual lineage of the Imami line with the political power of the ‘Abbasids, as had happened at the time of the designation of ‘Alī al-Riḍā as the heir to the Caliphate.⁵¹

The historicity of Abū ‘Īsā b. al-Mutawakkil’s involvement seems clear, both because there appears to be no doctrinal-polemical reason for Imamīs to have generated such a report and his involvement is corroborated in several independent versions.⁵² It is possible that the corpse might have been washed before Abū ‘Īsā b. al-Mutawakkil arrived, given that this would have been a private act, but such a public event as the prayer and the funeral would have been a big

⁴⁸ This contradicts the traditional Twelver account in which al-Ḥasan washed and prayed over his father’s corpse, see Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 3: 313.

⁴⁹ The text reads, in fact, Abū al-Ḥasan, which must be a mistake, for the anecdote makes no sense unless this refers to al-Hādī’s son, al-Ḥasan. Thus instead of Abū al-Ḥasan, we must read this as either Abū Muḥammad, or al-Ḥasan.

⁵⁰ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 290-1. Compare this report with the more detailed report in Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*, transmitted by al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī attending upon the tax-collector of Qumm, Aḥmad b. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Khāqān, who in turn transmits the story of the death of al-Ḥasan from his father, the vizier. In this report, Abū ‘Īsā Ibn al-Mutawakkil prays over al-Ḥasan’s corpse, and shows his face to the assembled ‘Alids and ‘Abbasids to prove his death. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 503-6. This report is also reproduced almost identically in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, transmitted by Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qummī. *Kamāl* 40-44. Following this report Ibn Bābūya comments that it incontrovertibly establishes the death of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, presumably in opposition to those Imamīs who stopped at the Imamate of al-Ḥasan. *Kamāl*, 44.

⁵¹ See Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London; New York: Longman, 1986), 153-4. Modarressi, *Crisis*, 11.

⁵² Hussain, *Occultation*, 57 n4; Sachedina, *Messianism*, 210 n.36.

public occasion. The fact of a non-ʿAlid praying over the Imam had immediate consequences for the question of Imamic succession. In some respects it was perhaps fitting that a prominent ʿAbbasid should perform the rituals of death in respect for his distant cousin. However, this was an unusual occurrence, as the nearest male kin was Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī. In this account the Caliph acts in haste to dispatch his brother, and this act is connected to the search for any offspring that al-Ḥasan might have had. Thus an implicit connection is made to the act of praying over the corpse and the status of the Imam’s heir. The Caliph, then, appears to be acting with the precise aim of intervening in the succession to the Imamate. Partly, this must be seen as resulting from sources hostile to the ʿAbbasids, who saw the Caliph meddling in everything regarding the Imam. On the other hand, ʿAbbasid interest in and surveillance of ʿAlid affairs was a reality – indeed a matter of political necessity for the ʿAbbasids, and we might well ask what the Caliph sought to gain from this intervention. Was this a spanner in the works of Imami succession? Or does it perhaps reflect the grooming of Abū ʿĪsā Ibn al-Mutawakkil for the Caliphate? Though Abū ʿĪsā Ibn al-Mutawakkil never succeeded to the caliphate, his was not an act without repercussions for the Imamis, for it did at least block Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī ‘the Liar’ from adopting this symbolic ritual role which might have supported his claim as the most viable living candidate for the Imamate.⁵³ This was the first of several pivotal moments in which Jaʿfar was outmaneuvered.

Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl* provides a doctrinally corrected version of the story of the funeral of the Eleventh Imam in which Jaʿfar is about to pray over the corpse, but the Child Imam miraculously appears to pray over his father instead. Again, in this version, the washing had already been accomplished, perhaps by a servant. The Child Imam stops Jaʿfar as he is about to

⁵³ Possible evidence of the Caliph’s bias against Jaʿfar may also be seen in reports that show that the Caliph later refused to arbitrate in Jaʿfar’s favor when he appealed to him to assert that he was indeed the successor to al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. See below.

pray over the corpse, saying, “Uncle it is more my right to pray over him than you,” at which, Ja‘far’s face became ashen, and yellowed.⁵⁴ This (presumably later) report fits the Child Imam into the traditional pattern of proofs of succession to the Imamate. The existence of this alternate report highlights the symbolic importance of praying over the previous Imam’s corpse as an indication of legitimate succession. Clearly at some point in the generations that succeeded al-Ḥasan’s death, the partisans of the child Imam suffered embarrassment at the fact that it was Ibn al-Mutawakkil who had prayed over him, rather than their Twelfth Imam, and the historical narratives shifted accordingly to generate new facts about the prayer. Later still, Ṭūsī provided an account in which the first Envoy conducted the funerary rites of the Eleventh Imam.⁵⁵ We might, then, construe these reports as forming a chronological sequence of claims upon the symbolism of the funerary rituals. The original report indicated an ‘Abbasid whose commission of the funerary rituals held no meaning, or even had a negative meaning for an Imami audience; the second step provided the more satisfying image of the Child Imam washing the corpse in keeping with precedent; and the third step in the chain established the claims of spiritual authority of the high-*wakīls*/Envoys, at a time when their *de facto* authority had already been accepted, and required further articulation.

4.3.2. The first twenty-four hours: securing the chattels and seizing the house

Once the funeral rites had been performed, the next confrontation was over the property of the deceased Imam, which, like the rites of death, provided key indications to the far-flung Shi‘i community about who had succeeded the Imam. Among the Imami Shi‘a, the term *waṣī*

⁵⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475-6.

⁵⁵ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225-6. Modarressi 92, n208. Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba*, however, was written substantially later, in 447/1055-6 (see Modarressi, *Crisis*, 84) and the report shows the influence of substantial theologized redaction, including the use of the word *‘adāla* to refer to the two ‘Amrīs, which strongly suggests a later phase of canonization.

means not only legal inheritor of property, but also successor to the spiritual leadership of the Imamate. This is suggestive of an important connection between the physical inheritance of the house and chattels of the Imams and succession to Imamate. The potential for the conflation between the physical and the spiritual legacy throws light on the intensity of the confrontation over al-Ḥasan's inheritance, and its relevance to the later Shi'i scholars who transmit the reports about it.⁵⁶ Ja'far was outmaneuvered twice in his attempts to secure the property of the Imam; once when he attempted to physically secure the chattels of the Imam, and again when he tried to mount a legal claim to the exclusion of al-Ḥasan's mother, through arbitration of the *qāḍī* and the Caliph. Soon after al-Ḥasan passed away, some sources present Ja'far in a dramatic attempt to secure the property of the deceased Imam:

محمد بن عبد الحميد البزاز وأبي الحسين بن مسعود الفراتي قال... وان جعفر... كان في ليلة أبي محمد (عليه السلام) ختم الخزائن وكلما في الدار ومضى إلى منزله فلما أصبح أتى الدار ودخلها ليحمل ما ختم عليه فلما فتح الخواتم ودخل نظرنا فلم يبق في الدار ولا في الخزائن الا قدرا يسيرا فضرب جماعة من الخدم ومن الإماء فقالوا له : لا تضربنا فوالله لقد رأينا الأمتعة والرجال توقر الجمال في الشارع ونحن لا نستطيع الكلام ولا الحركة إلى أن سارت الجمال وغلقت الأبواب كما كانت فولول جعفر وضرب على رأسه أسفا على ما خرج من الدار.

Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Bazzāz and Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Mas'ūd al-Furātī said that ... on the night of [the death of] Abū Muḥammad [al-'Askarī], Ja'far sealed the storehouses and whatever was in the house. Then he passed to his lodging, and in the morning he came to the house and entered it in order to carry off the things he had placed his seal upon, but when he opened the seals (*khawātim*) and he looked inside, there was nothing but a trifling amount left in the house or in the storehouses. He beat all of the

⁵⁶ See also the example above of the *Naftsiyya* splinter group who favored Ja'far, and whose conception of succession placed great significance upon the physical transmission of certain objects between one Imam and another. Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 88-9.

servants and the slave girls and they said to him, “Do not beat us, by God! Indeed we saw the possessions, but the men loaded the camels in the street, and we were unable to speak or move until the camels set off, after which the doors were locked just as they had been. Ja‘far gave out a great howl of dismay, and struck his head in sorrow at what had left the house.⁵⁷

This report suggests that immediate action was taken upon the death of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, as if no time were to be lost to take control of the symbolic and physical legacy of the Imam. Other reports implicate Ja‘far in violent action against the house of the Imams, including a report in which Ja‘far is described as bringing a band of horsemen to raid and loot the house, forcing the child Imam to escape by disappearing suddenly.⁵⁸ In yet another report Ja‘far instigates someone called Sīmā’ to use an axe to attack the door of the Imam’s house, but a servant comes out and says that the house is occupied.⁵⁹ While such anti-Ja‘far accounts tend to stress his worldly avarice, there was a strategic aspect to Ja‘far’s actions beyond immediate materialism. The symbolic power vested in certain possessions of the Imam is well established,⁶⁰ and the house of the Imams was a focus for pilgrimage and the central location for the collection of canonical taxes.

⁵⁷ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 288-9.

⁵⁸ A report transmitted from the great-grandfather of al-Ḥasan b. Wajnā’ corroborates the spirit of Ja‘far’s desperate action. It reports that Ja‘far and a group of horsemen attacked the house with the intention of looting (*nahb*) and raiding (*ghāra*), but that the Twelfth Imam was saved from danger when he miraculously disappeared. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 470-2.

⁵⁹ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 331-2.

⁶⁰ For a description of the early Shi‘i conception of *waṣīyya*, including the transmission of physical items like swords, turbans and, of course, books, see Rubin, “Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shī‘a Tradition,” *JSAI*, 1 (1979): 45-51. While much of this may belong to the realm of the purely mythical, it is certain that the sanctity of the Imam was considered to be suffused into the gifts they gave their followers, and presumably other physical objects in their possession also. There is no reason to believe, thus, that there were not significant objects of real symbolic power present among the possessions to be inherited from the Imam.

The intriguing detail about Ja‘far placing seals upon the property suggests an attempt to stake claim to it provisionally, perhaps to avoid casual theft by domestics or rivals, such as other relations or followers of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. A report cited by Kulaynī also refers to seals being placed upon the property of the Imam, but in this case by the Caliph’s agents: “And the Sultan sent someone to [al-Ḥasan’s] house to examine (*fattasha*) its rooms and place seals upon everything in it (*khattama ‘alā jamī‘i mā fī-hā*) and seek his offspring...”⁶¹ What can we make of these contradictions regarding the sealing of property? Did Ja‘far place seals to lay claim to the property of the Imam, or was it the Caliph who sealed the Imam’s property, or was there some other hand instrumental in foiling Ja‘far’s designs? Certainly, if it was the authorities who placed seals on the property to thwart Ja‘far, we might expect this detail to be removed from a narrative that presents the thwarting of Ja‘far as the punishment of God. Whoever his antagonist, Ja‘far is depicted as having been foiled in his attempt to secure the chattels of the Imam from the outset. Employing locks and seals suggests that he was demonstrating an official claim, not just attempting to steal the property and carry it off. It is very probable that the authorities might have had some involvement in upholding the mechanisms that ensured the fair handling of the property of the deceased. However, given the intensely politicized and factional nature of ‘Abbasid authority during the Samarra period, it is impossible to judge conclusively as to who might have been behind the move to hinder Ja‘far’s claim to his brother’s property, whether a high-placed Imami courtier, the *qāḍī*, or the Caliph himself. Nonetheless, we can perhaps feel more certainty regarding the overall patterns. While the reports about Ja‘far are heavily influenced by later propaganda, it is plausible to see them as reflecting the fact that Ja‘far was

⁶¹ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:505.

prevented from taking possession of a crucial symbol of continuity and an ongoing focus of pilgrimage; the Imams' house.

4.3.3. The inheritance dispute and the phantom pregnancy: the factors behind the original claim for the birth of a Child Imam

Having been prevented from taking immediate possession of the Imam's house, perhaps by the 'Abbasid authorities themselves, Ja'far is frequently depicted as having attempted to bring the case for his inheritance before the authorities – the *qāḍī* and the Caliph. The chief claimant to the inheritance apart from Ja'far, was al-Ḥasan's mother, Ḥudayth. In addition to her, and perhaps at her instigation, at some point a concubine claimed to be pregnant with al-Ḥasan's son and heir should inherit and succeed to his position. The dispute between Ja'far and Ḥudayth appears to be entirely historical, as all relevant reports agree upon the fact that they disputed the inheritance, and it was eventually divided between them. Such a black and white fact as who received the property of the Imam, indeed, would have been difficult to replace by alternate accounts. Beyond this central fact, however, there are almost no important details which are agreed upon unanimously. Even the historical timeline of when events took place are murky, though many of the accounts suggest that the dispute dragged on for several years.

The narrative contradictions regarding the division of al-Ḥasan's inheritance suggest various opposing political and doctrinal positions that were brought into play by the dispute. As in the case of the funerary rites, the issue of inheritance directly implicates the identity of the successor to the Imam, and in two dimensions: firstly the person who physically inherited the Imam's property had a head start in claiming his spiritual legacy, in particular possession of the house of the Imams which provided the opportunity for directing the pilgrimage activities surrounding the shrines of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams. Secondly, the claims for the existence

of a Child Imam first came to public attention in the context of the dispute over the inheritance, which could not be divided until claims that al-Ḥasan had a surviving boy could be resolved. Thus, the idea of the posthumous pregnancy appears to have constituted both a practical obstacle to the resolution of the inheritance, and also a doctrinal step which either had to be rejected or accepted. Once accepted, the idea of the Child Imam had an independent existence from its roots in the posthumous pregnancy, but the reports remained.

Al-Ḥasan's mother was not in Samarra at the moment of her son's death, according to one of the accounts we have – the same report that contains the narrative of Ṣaqīl and 'Aqīd attending the Imam as he washed his body in preparation for death. The report continues:

قدمت أم أبي محمد عليه السلام من المدينة واسمها " حديث " حين اتصل بها الخبر إلى سر من رأى فكانت لها أقاصيص يطول شرحها مع أخيه جعفر ومطالبته إياها بميراثه وسعايته بها إلى السلطان وكشفه ما أمر الله عز وجل بستره

...The mother of Abū Muḥammad, whose name was Ḥudayth, came from Medina when the news reached her from Samarra. And she had troubles (lit: 'stories', *aqāṣiṣ*) too long to explain with his brother Ja'far, and his demanding his inheritance from her, and his slandering her behind her back to the Sultan, and his revealing of things that God (AJ) commanded to be concealed...⁶²

Given that our sources are overwhelmingly hostile towards Ja'far, we can assume that Ja'far's 'slandering' Ḥudayth to the Caliph may refer simply his attempt to seek arbitration in the case of the inheritance. Several other reports depict Ja'far seeking the arbitration of the Caliph.⁶³ It

⁶² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473-4

⁶³ In particular there are reports in which Ja'far appears to ask the Caliph's arbitration in his favor over the matter of who should be Imam and receive tithes from the Shi'i community. It is likely that this appeal was understood in tandem with his claim to the inheritance. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 503-6. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 476-9.

would most likely have taken a few weeks for Ḥudayth to hear the news and then travel to Samarra. Meanwhile, the authorities presumably maintained the Imam's property sealed and undivided. After this appeal to the authorities, the report continues as follows:

فادعت عند ذلك صقيل أنها حامل فحملت إلى دار المعتمد فجعل نساء المعتمد وخدمه ، ونساء الموفق وخدمه ،
ونساء القاضي ابن أبي الشوارب يتعاهدن أمرها في كل وقت . ويراعون إلى أن دهمهم أمر الصغار وموت عبيد
الله بن يحيى بن خاقان بغتة ، وخروجهم من سر من رأى وأمر صاحب الزنج بالبصرة وغير ذلك فشغلهم ذلك
عنها

And upon that (*inda dhālik*) Ṣaḳīl claimed that she was pregnant, and she was carried to the house of al-Mu'tamid. The women of Mu'tamid and his servants, the women of Muwaffaq and his servants, and the women of the *qāḍī* Ibn Abī Shawārib inspected her condition continuously. They watched [her] until the matter of al-Ṣaffār and the death of 'Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān suddenly crushed them, and their exit from Samarra and the matter of *Ṣāḥib al-Zanj* at Baṣra, and other things distracted their attention from her."⁶⁴

There is a clear link in this account between the inheritance dispute of Ja'far versus Ḥudayth, and Ṣaḳīl the Concubine's claim that she was pregnant. The mention of the phantom pregnancy is widespread among the sources, and there are good reasons to suppose that this claim represents a historical event.⁶⁵ Given that the division of the presumably extensive estate of the Imam was in question, a certain amount of due diligence, probably supervised by the *qāḍī*, would certainly have been in order. All of this served to delay the division of the inheritance of the Imam. It would have been several months before the authorities achieved certainty on the question of the

⁶⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 474.

⁶⁵ See Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 85, for the heresiographical treatment of this claim, and below for a more detailed discussion.

child, and the division of the inheritance is clearly tied to the judgment about the phantom pregnancy.⁶⁶

Who, meanwhile, was in control of the Imam's house in this crucial early period when the idea of the Child Imam began to be broadcast? As we have seen, the violent attacks on the Eleventh Imam's house and property suggest that Ja'far might have been prevented from taking up residence in the Imam's house.⁶⁷ Whatever prevented Ja'far from immediately taking possession of the Imam's inheritance and his house, this was a crucial element of the power play for the Imamate, for both symbolic and financial reasons. Some reports suggest that that Ja'far could ill afford delays due to the precariousness of his own personal finances. The report quoted above, in which Ja'far places his seal on the chattels of the Imam to secure them, continues as follows:

فولول جعفر وضرب على رأسه أسفا على ما خرج من الدار وانه بقي يأكل ما كأنه له ويبيع حتى ما بقي له قوت يوم وكان له في الدار أربعة وعشرون ولدا بنون وبنات ولهم أمهات وأولاد وحشم وخدم وغلما ن فبلغ به الفقر إلى أن أمرت الجدة وهي جدة إلى محمد (عليه السلام) ان يجري عليه من مالها الدقيق واللحم والشعير والتين لدوابه وكسوة لأولاده وأمهاتهم وحشمه وغلما نهم ونفقاتهم ولقد ظهرت أشياء منه أكثر مما وصفنا نسأل الله العافية من . البلاء والعصمة في الدنيا والآخرة .

Then Ja'far gave out a great howl of dismay, and struck his head in sorrow at what had left the house and he continued to eat what he had, selling [his possessions] until there was nothing left for him but the sustenance of a single day. He had a household of twenty-four children, girls and boys, and they had mothers and children, retainers (*hasham*), servants and slaves... and he reached such poverty that His grandmother, that

⁶⁶ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 503-6.

⁶⁷ See above.

is the grandmother to Muḥammad [the Twelfth Imam] (AS),⁶⁸ was ordered to send him some of her goods: her flour, and meat and barley, chaff for his riding beasts, and clothes for his children and their mothers, his retinue and his servant boys, and their wages. But many more things appeared from him other than those which we have described. (We ask God’s forgiveness from torment, and purity in this world and the afterlife).⁶⁹

This report is clearly very largely governed by the polemic attributing dirty motives to Ja‘far in his claim on the inheritance, and showing him to eke out a humiliating existence receiving the charity of his rival for the inheritance. It is rather striking that Ja‘far is forced to accept charity from al-Ḥasan’s mother. The report appears to suggest that Ja‘far’s failure to immediately establish his claim on the inheritance resulted in loss of social standing and complete dependence upon others.⁷⁰ While this report is probably exaggerated, and perhaps fabricated, it might also contribute further evidence to suggest that Ja‘far was the loser in the confrontation with Ḥudayth. While the inheritance was frozen or Ja‘far was excluded from it, it precluded him from using the Imam’s establishment to mount a legitimate-seeming claim to the spiritual inheritance of the Imamate. Conversely, if Ḥudayth was installed in the house of the Imams, as there is some evidence to suggest she was,⁷¹ she had control of the symbolic capital invested in the location.

Returning to the question of inheritance, our sources use a piece of key terminology – the concept of the legacy (*waṣīyya*) – to suggest that Ḥudayth established with the authorities her identity as a designated heir of the Eleventh Imam. The following report is cited both by Kulaynī and by Ibn Bābūya, with subtle variants, transmitted from an anti-Shi‘i (*nāṣīb*) ‘Abbasid

⁶⁸ This is probably a later insertion. In the early *ghayba* period it was still forbidden to mention the name of the *mahdī*. However, Ḥudayth is often known simply as “the grandmother”.

⁶⁹ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 288-9.

⁷⁰ We will see further reports of Ja‘far’s humiliating poverty below.

⁷¹ See the pilgrimage narrative from the ‘era of Ḥudayth,’ below.

bureaucrat who was stationed in Qumm, Aḥmad b. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān, who passed the report down to Qummī traditionists on the authority of his father, ‘Ubayd Allāh, an energetic political actor of the Samarra period and vizier to the Caliph al-Mu‘tamid at the time of the death of al-‘Askarī.⁷²

فلما بطل الحمل عنهن قسم ميراثه بين أمه وأخيه جعفر وادعت أمه وصيته وثبت ذلك عند القاضي ، والسلطان على ذلك يطلب أثر ولده فجاء جعفر بعد ذلك إلى أبي فقال : اجعل لي مرتبه أخي وأوصل إليك في كل سنة عشرين ألف دينار ، فزبره أبي وأسمعه وقال له : يا أحمق السلطان جرد سيفه في الذين زعموا أن أباك وأخاك أنمة ليردهم عن ذلك ، فلم يتهياً له ذلك ، فإن كنت عند شيعة أبيك أو أخيك إماما فلا حاجة بك إلى السلطان [أن يرتبك مراتبهما

When the pregnancy was proved fictitious by those women [who had been sent by the Caliph to inspect the Imam’s concubines], the inheritance was divided between [‘Askarī’s] mother and his brother Ja‘far. His mother claimed a legacy (*waṣīyya*) and established that with the *qāḍī*. Upon that, the Caliph asked after his offspring left behind, and after that Ja‘far came to my father [the vizier] ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān] and said, “Establish me in the rank of my brother, and I will send to you every year 20,000 dinars.” My father scolded him in my hearing and he said to him, “You fool! The Sultan has drawn his sword against those who claim that your father and your brothers are Imams in order to coerce them from that [claim], and he has not been able to do so. If you were an Imam for your father and your brother’s Shi‘a, then you would have no need for the [arbitration of the] Sultan to establish you in their rank.⁷³

⁷² His second tenure as vizier, under the Caliph al-Mu‘tamid, was from 256/869-70 until he died in 263/877, Matthew Gordon, “The Khāqānid Families of the Early ‘Abbasid Period,” *JAOS*, Vol. 121, No. 2 (2001): 244-247; Kennedy, *Prophet*, 176.

⁷³ This report is from Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 505-6. See also the almost identical version in *Kamāl*, 475-6.

This report gives us a clear sense of the conflation of the physical and spiritual aspects of the *waṣīyya* legacy. The account flips suddenly from the concept of the physical inheritance of house and chattels, to that of the spiritual leadership of the Shi‘a. Ja‘far is presented as being ridiculous in attempting to solicit political support from outside the Shi‘i community to help him fight his battles.⁷⁴

A crucial element of the above report is that Ḥudayth claimed to be the heir, or legatee (*waṣī*) of the Imam, a term which is attached to her in several other narratives.⁷⁵ We will return to the spiritual connotations of this term below, but in the context of the inheritance, it suggests that al-Ḥasan had made an additional provision for Ḥudayth in his will to Ja‘far’s disadvantage.⁷⁶ Modarressi suggests that Ja‘far’s reputation among the Imamis was sullied by his appeal to the hated Sunni authorities,⁷⁷ but Ḥudayth clearly appears as seeking arbitration from the authorities also, and her memory is preserved in a positive light for Twelver posterity. Modarressi also suggests that Ḥudayth gained an advantage in the inheritance case by herself engineering the claim that one of al-Ḥasan’s concubines was pregnant, thereby aiming to exclude Ja‘far entirely from the inheritance,⁷⁸ but this would seem an unusual means of stalling, given the inevitability of any such fiction being disproved soon after. However, unusual is not the same as impossible,

⁷⁴ However, our sources are far from consistent about the significance of association with the ‘Abbasid authorities. A report in *Hidāya* regarding the establishment of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī as Imam after al-Hādī for example, assigns a fairly significant role to the Caliph’s deference and respect as a means of indicating the high status of the Imam, with the Caliph appearing in an official function to console the new Imam on the death of his father, establishing him in the rank of his father. Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 291.

⁷⁵ See below.

⁷⁶ Modarressi also cites two slightly later works as evidence for Ḥudayth’s being named in the will; Mufid’s *al-Fuṣūl al-‘ashara*, and Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba*, Modarressi, *Crisis*, 78 n. 126.

⁷⁷ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 78-9.

⁷⁸ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 78. This claim is to be found in the anonymous, *Dustūr al-munaḥḥimīn*, a manuscript of which exists in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, in Paris, which I have not yet been able to consult.

and it is very hard to determine what might have been claimed in the heat of the historical moment.

Whatever the difficulties in establishing the details of the narrative, it is hard to justify any skepticism regarding the basic fact that the inheritance was bitterly disputed between Ja‘far and Ḥudayth, that the resolution of this dispute was delayed due to the concubine’s claim to be pregnant, and that the dispute was eventually resolved after the pregnancy had proved to be a phantom, through arbitration of the *qaḍī*, perhaps with the interest of the Caliph himself. It is unclear how long the dispute about the inheritance might have taken. Our sources suggest that it might have lasted anywhere between eight months and seven years. Nawbakhtī mentions that not one, but two of the splinter groups after al-Ḥasan claimed that a woman was pregnant with a Child Imam who was son to al-Ḥasan. One of these groups believed that it was a noble woman (*sariyya*) who was pregnant, and that the pregnancy would be prolonged until some unspecified time in the future.⁷⁹ Another claimed that the truth of the Concubine’s pregnancy had been proven by the examinations of ‘Abbasid authorities, and that she gave birth eight months after his death (though this fact had been hidden, presumably miraculously, from the authorities who formerly had affirmed her pregnancy).⁸⁰ Ibn Bābūya’s version of the report from Aḥmad Ibn Khāqān gives two years as the time it took for the phantom pregnancy to be disproved, and the inheritance to be divided, that is in 262/876.⁸¹ However, the stability of this date is thrown into doubt by the fact that an almost identical report appears in the earlier work, Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*, in

⁷⁹ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 85-6. This account appears to have been generated through the idealising re-conceptualization of the circumstances surrounding the phantom pregnancy, in which the lowly concubine was exchanged for a noble woman, and the problematic involvement falsification of the pregnancy by the authorities being replaced by a *ghayba*-style solution in which the pregnant woman was anonymous and her pregnancy was miraculously hyper-extended.

⁸⁰ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 85.

⁸¹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 40-4.

which this dating is omitted,⁸² and by the fact that the usual waiting period for a woman whose consort had died was around three to four months.⁸³ Modarressi, on the other hand, asserts that the inheritance of al-Ḥasan had been divided between Ḥudayth and Ja‘far “after seven years of struggle.”⁸⁴ In another pair of reports cited by Ibn Bābūya, the date of the ending of the surveillance of the pregnant concubine is established with reference to various political events, which again suggest (not unambiguously) that this event occurred around 262/876. In the report quoted from Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, above, we are told that she was watched “until the matter of al-Ṣaffār,⁸⁵ and the death of ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān⁸⁶ suddenly crushed them; and their attention was distracted from her by their exit from Samarra⁸⁷ and the matter of Ṣāḥib al-Zanj⁸⁸ at Baṣra.”⁸⁹ The death of Ibn Khāqān and the rising of Ṣāḥib al-Zanj at Baṣra are also used as indicators in another report mentioned by Ibn Bābūya, in which the concubine is said to have escaped.⁹⁰ The inheritance dispute, then, must have lasted around two years, until at least 262/876, upon which date many of these reports seem to converge.

Ḥudayth requested to be buried in the house after her death, a request which Ja‘far was loathe to grant. In the following report, Ja‘far’s churlish reluctance to allow Ḥudayth to be buried in the Imam’s house results in the miraculous intervention of the Twelfth Imam:

⁸² Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 503-6.

⁸³ See Ṭūsī’s *Nihāya*, the subchapter of the section on divorce which deals with the complexities of the waiting period of a woman in different circumstances. *Nihāya*, ed. Āqā Bozorg-e Tehrānī, (Tehran: Maktabat ahl al-bayt, 1962) 531-9.

⁸⁴ He bases this statement upon a citation from Nawbakhtī and Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qummī. See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 79.

⁸⁵ Ya‘qūb b. Layth al-Ṣaffār was defeated by al-Muwaffaq in 262/876. See Bosworth, “Saffarids,” *EIr*.

⁸⁶ ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān died in 262/876. See Gordon, “Khaqānid families,” 246.

⁸⁷ Samarra was formally abandoned as capital in 279/892, but the caliph Mu‘tamid is not known to have visited it after 269/884, other than to be buried. See Alistair Northedge, “Samarra,” *EI2*.

⁸⁸ The Zanj revolt was conducted from 255/869 to 270/883. The suppression of the Zanj became a prime concern of the caliphate from 266/883. See A. Popovic, “Zanj,” *EI2*.

⁸⁹ See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473-4 and above.

⁹⁰ See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 476.

عن محمد بن صالح بن علي بن محمد بن قنبر الكبير مولى الرضا عليه السلام قال : خرج صاحب الزمان على جعفر الكذاب من موضع لم يعلم به عندما نازع في الميراث بعد مضي أبي محمد عليه السلام فقال له : يا جعفر مالك تعرض في حقوقي ؟ فتحير جعفر وبهت ، ثم غاب عنه ، فطلبه جعفر بعد ذلك في الناس فلم يره ، فلما ماتت الجدة أم الحسن أمرت أن تدفن في الدار ، فنازعهم وقال : هي داري لا تدفن فيها ، فخرج عليه السلام فقال : يا جعفر أدارك هي ؟ ، ثم غاب عنه فلم يره بعد ذلك

Muḥammad b. Šāliḥ b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Qanbar the Elder, mawlā of [Imam] Riḍā (AS) said: The Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*) came out to Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ from a location that he did not know about and confronted him during the time when he was disputing the inheritance (*mīrāth*) after the death of Abū Muḥammad (AS). And he said to him "Oh Ja‘far! What is with you? Why do you intervene in the matter of my rights⁹¹ (*ta ‘riḍu fī ḥuqūqī*)?" Ja‘far was perplexed and astonished. Then he disappeared from him (*ghāba ‘anhu*). And after that Ja‘far sought him amongst the people, but he did not see him. And when the grandmother [of the Twelfth Imam], al-Ḥasan’s mother died she ordered that she should be buried in the house, but he opposed them and said, “It’s my house. She shall not be buried in it!” But [the Twelfth Imam] (AS) came out and said "Oh Ja‘far - is it *your* house?" Then he disappeared (*ghāba ‘anhu*), and he did not see him after that.⁹²

According to this report, then, Ja‘far did eventually take possession of the Imam’s house, for he was, by the time of her death, master enough to dispute her burial in it. The Child Imam is here depicted as intervening to uphold the rights of his grandmother. This Imamic intervention in her favor strongly suggests the existence of political movement in her support which was able to

⁹¹ This probably refers to Ja‘far’s attempt to appropriate the tithes (often referred to as *ḥuqūq*) of the Imami delegations to Samarra.

⁹² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442.

propagate reports such as this which demonstrate that she was the object of divine favor. Ḥudayth was clearly a significant player among early Twelvers for reasons beyond mere physical inheritance.

4.4. Spokespersons for the Child Imam as an alternative to Ja‘far

4.4.1. Ḥudayth, mother of al-‘Askarī: the first intermediary of the Imam?

When Ja‘far gained control of the Imam’s house, following the death of Ḥudayth, there was no longer any opportunity for those who upheld the Imamate of the Child Imam to use the symbolism of the house to further their cause. However, before she died, Ḥudayth’s spiritual leadership as a kind of viceregent for the hidden Child Imam influenced the initial formation of the doctrinal and institutional conception of the new Twelver community. In adopting this kind of leadership, she employed the terminology of *waṣiyya* which had a venerable tradition in the imamological and prophetological thinking of the Imamis.

There are a variety of reports amongst our sources that indicate that al-‘Askarī’s mother was not only the initial inheritor of the Eleventh Imam’s property, but that she was also the first figure to claim to be the intermediary of the Twelfth Imam. This has never been sufficiently acknowledged. Modarressi buries the following comment in a footnote: “[Ḥudayth] was also the one considered by many Imāmites as the caretaker of the office in the absence of her vanished grandson.”⁹³ She was the most immediate inheritor of the spiritual legacy of the Imams, acting as the intermediary between the community and the Child Imam.⁹⁴ In this sense, then, she played a role akin to that of an Envoy before the *wakīls* established their leadership, though the sources contain no suggestion that she might have operated a network of canonical tax-collectors as the

⁹³Modarressi, *Crisis*, 78 n126.

⁹⁴ See the citation from Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276, quoted below, in which she is even said to distribute the Hidden Imam’s written statements, as the *wakīls* did also. This report, however does not appear to be very trustworthy.

Imams had, and the *wakīls* would do. The following report, which exists in several versions, presents a statement of her role, in the words of her relative and ally, the sister of al-Ḥasan. It begins with the familiar topos of seeking knowledge about the identity of the Imam after al-Ḥasan:

حدثنا أحمد بن إبراهيم قال : دخلت على حكيمة بنت محمد بن علي الرضا أخت أبي الحسن العسكري عليهم السلام في سنة اثنين وثمانين بالمدينة فكلمتها من وراء الحجاب وسألتها عن دينها فسمت لي من تأتم به ، ثم قالت : فلان بن الحسن عليه السلام فسمته ، فقلت لها : جعلني الله فداك معاينة أو خيرا ؟ فقالت : خيرا عن أبي محمد عليه السلام كتب به إلى أمه ، فقلت لها : فأين المولود ؟ فقالت : مستور ، فقلت : فإلى من تفرع الشيعة ؟ فقالت : إلى الجدة أم أبي محمد عليه السلام

Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm said: I went in to Ḥakīma, daughter of Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Riḍā the sister of Abū al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, [i.e. al-Hādī, the Tenth Imam] in the year 262, in Medina, and I spoke to her from behind the curtain (*hijāb*) and I asked her about her faith (*dīn*), and she named for me the one through whom it would be completed:⁹⁵ she said “‘so-and-so’ (*fulān*) son of al-Ḥasan [i.e. the Twelfth Imam]” and she named him. I said to her, “[Did you receive this information] as an eyewitness, (*mu‘āyinan*) or as a written report (*khabaran*)?” And she said, “As a written report from Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] who wrote about him [the Twelfth Imam] to his mother.” So I said to her, “So where is the child?” She said, “Hidden (*mastūr*).” I said, “With whom do the Shi‘a seek succor (*ilā man tafza‘u al-shī‘a*)?” She said, “The grandmother”, Abū Muḥammad’s mother.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ This echoes Q 5:3, and the circumstances of ‘Alī’s designation by Muḥammad at Ghadīr Khumm.

⁹⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 501.

While al-‘Askarī’s aunt, here, does not claim to be an eyewitness to the Child Imam,⁹⁷ instead attributing her knowledge to written communication with the Eleventh Imam, she does state that al-‘Askarī’s mother has a more direct active role. This suggests, then, that al-‘Askarī’s mother was active at this early stage, two years after the death of al-‘Askarī, making claims for the existence of the Child Imam, and positioning herself as his intermediary to whom the Shi‘a should go for succor and aid. That is to say, she was the visible representative of the Imam’s guidance. The report goes on to address the problematic issue of the Imam being represented by a woman:

فقلت لها : أقتدي بمن وصيته إلى المرأة ؟ فقالت : اقتداء بالحسين بن علي بن أبي طالب عليهما السلام إن الحسين بن علي عليهما السلام أوصى إلى أخته زينب بنت علي بن أبي طالب عليه السلام في الظاهر ، وكان ما يخرج عن علي بن - الحسين من علم ينسب إلي زينب بنت علي تسترا على علي بن الحسين ، ثم قالت : إنكم قوم أصحاب أخبار ، وأما رويتم أن التاسع من ولد الحسين عليه السلام يقسم ميراثه وهو في حياة

So I said to her “Am I to imitate one whose is succeeded by a woman (*man waṣiyyatuhu ilā al-mar’a*)?” She said “In imitation of al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (AS). Al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (AS) made out his legacy to his sister Zaynab bt. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (AS) to outward appearances (*fi al-zāhir*). The knowledge (*ilm*) that issued from ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn was attributed to Zaynab bt. ‘Alī in order to hide (*tasatturan*) ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn.” Then she said, “You are a people of ḥadīth transmitters. Have you not transmitted that the inheritance (*mīrāth*) of the ninth descendent of al-Ḥusayn will be divided while he is alive?”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ In other, less plausible accounts, the aunt is indeed depicted as being an eyewitness to the Child Imam. See, for example, Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 264-267; Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 1:330-1 h3, and the discussion of the role of the aunt below.

⁹⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 501.

Al-Ḥasan's mother, then, is seen as the full inheritor of the spiritual legacy of the Eleventh Imam, as a visible viceregent to the hidden Child Imam. This claim regarding Ḥudayth's role as spiritual legatee and executor is transmitted in the words of another direct relation of the Imam, his sister, sometimes referred to as Ḥakīma, and sometimes as Khadīja, plausibly suggesting an alliance of interests between these female relations of the Imam. Ḥudayth's spiritual authority is predicated entirely upon her role as a legatee (*waṣī*) who bridges the gap between two Imams, particularly in the case of the minority of the Imam. Ḥakīma/Khadīja compares this to the transmission of the Imamate between the Third Imam al-Ḥusayn and his son 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn, the Fourth Imam, which was seen as having been accomplished by a female intermediary legatee, or *waṣī*, *Zaynab bt. 'Alī*, the aunt of the Fourth Imam.⁹⁹ Clearly, then, there was a period in which Ḥudayth's claim to be the *waṣī* had undergone theological and hadith-based justifications, which suggest she had scholarly supporters, or that either Ḥudayth or Ḥakīma/Khadīja had sufficient hadith-knowledge to generate such justifications themselves. Though she does not appear in the heresiographies, Ḥudayth's claim to be the Child Imam's intermediary appears to have been the first such claim, and the one upon which subsequent claims were made, hence its residual inclusion amongst the Twelver sources as a legitimate statement of the existence of the Twelfth Imam. An important element of this report is the fact that it explicitly responds to the potential epistemological challenges of the hadith-transmitters. Ḥudayth's claim is presented in the language of hadith evidence. As Ja'far's case amply attests, an Imamic lineage was alone insufficient to furnish authority. Authority also needed to be

⁹⁹ A more immediate historical example in which a *waṣīyya* legacy was claimed as being the mechanism for the transference from one Imam to another is that exemplified by one of the groups who claimed the Imamate of Ja'far 'the Liar' – the so-called '*Nafīsiyya*' who claimed that Ja'far's eldest brother had passed on the Imamate, and the Imam's possessions via the servant-boy legatee Nafīs. See above, and Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 88-9.

expressed in the language of the hadith scholars: who had become an influential epistemic elite for the Imami community. We will return to the role of the scholars in testing claims to authority below, when we assess the failure of Ja‘far’s claim.

As viceregent to the hidden Child Imam, it is likely that Ḥudayth coordinated some of the rites and institutions later associated with the Envoys. In one report, for example, she is associated with the pilgrimage to the Imams buried in the house in Samarra:

عن جعفر بن عمرو قال : خرجت إلى العسكر وأم أبي محمد عليه السلام في الحياة ومعها جماعة ، فوافينا العسكر فكتب أصحابي يستأذنون في الزيارة من داخل باسم رجل رجل ، فقلت : لا تثبتوا اسمي فإني لا أستأذن فتركوا اسمي فخرج الاذن " ادخلوا ومن أبي أن يستأذن "

Ja‘far b. ‘Amr said: I went out to Samarra (*al-‘Askar*) while Umm Abī Muḥammad [the mother of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī] was alive and there was a group with me, and we reached Samarra (*al-‘Askar*) and my companions wrote to ask permission to do the pilgrimage on the inside (*al-ziyāra min dākhl*), with the name of each, man by man. But I said "Do not add my name for I do not request permission". So they left my name out and the permission was issued, "Enter! Including he who scorns to ask permission."¹⁰⁰

The “pilgrimage on the inside” apparently refers to entering into the house of the Imams, rather than just visiting from the outside. There is a possible suggestion here that the narrator, Ja‘far b. ‘Amr, suspects the legitimacy of Ḥudayth, and this is why he scorns to request permission to enter to do pilgrimage. However, he is won over by the demonstration of miraculous knowledge through which his presence among his companions is divined, which proves to him the religious legitimacy of the Imam’s establishment. Read alongside other reports of the miraculous activities

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498.

of the high-*wakīls*/Envoys presented in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, this might seem to refer to them. However, this account contains no reference to the high-*wakīls*/Envoys, but rather we are told that the pilgrimage to Samarra was made "while Umm Abī Muḥammad was alive." By using her to orient the narrator's sense of dating, this report suggests that the event took place in what was considered 'the era of Ḥudayth'. It is possible, indeed likely, that prominent servants, functionaries and *wakīls* would have been involved also at this stage, to coordinate the rites and institutions of the Imamate to the same extent that they had always done, receiving any monies and letters that the pilgrims brought. But at this early stage, it was Ḥudayth, not the *wakīls*, who appears as the moral center of the post-Ḥasan Imamate.

One of the most remarkable reports regarding the role of al-Ḥasan's mother appears in a tradition in which she is depicted as part of a Nuṣayrī genealogy of intermediaries for the Imams:

وكانت كتبه ودلائله وتوقيعاته (عليه السلام) تخرج على يد أبي شعيب محمد بن نصير بن بكر النميري البصري
فلما توفي خرجت على يد جدته أم أبي محمد (عليه السلام) وعلى ابنه محمد بن عثمان

Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Ḥasanī: ... And [the Twelfth Imam's] letters (*kuṭub*) and signs and rescripts (*tawqī'āt*) were issued at the hands of Abū Shu'ayb Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr b. Bakr al-Namīrī, and when he died they were issued at the hands of his grandmother, Umm Abū Muḥammad, and his son Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān.¹⁰¹

Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr is regarded by Nuṣayrīs to have been the '*bāb*' or intermediary for the Tenth and Eleventh Imams. Here he is said here to have been succeeded by al-Ḥasan's mother, who was herself succeeded by the second Envoy, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Sa'īd b. 'Uthmān al-'Amrī.¹⁰² It is unlikely that Ḥudayth would have associated herself with this genealogy of

¹⁰¹ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276.

¹⁰² If this is true, then it is a very remarkable step in this genealogy of divine mediation. Is it a problem that this Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān is described as Ibn Nuṣayr's "son"? Not necessarily. The Nuṣayrīs are, in fact, distinctive in

spiritual mediation from Ibn Nuṣayr. As we have mentioned above, to be an intermediary in the Nuṣayrī context is not merely to be a spokesperson for the Imam, but to participate in the Imam’s manifestation of the divine essence.¹⁰³ There is no reason to suspect that Ḥudayth was making such claims for herself. However unlikely it might be that Ḥudayth understood herself to have been a *bāb*-like figure in the Nuṣayrī sense, this report does demonstrate that her tenure as the Imam’s intermediary was viewed as significant enough by a portion of the Shi‘i community for her to be written into their ongoing project of pantheon-making. Furthermore, it suggests that her tenure was chronologically prior to that of the *wakīls*/Envoys, who themselves appear in the genealogy after Ḥudayth, represented by the second Envoy, *but not the first*.¹⁰⁴

To sum up the role of al-Ḥasan’s mother, Ḥudayth, she moved from Medina to Samarra soon after the death of her son, and, having provisionally secured control of the house of the Imams, she appears to have operated from that house as the spokeswoman and intermediary for the Twelfth Imam. There is no reason for us to judge as false those Twelver and Nuṣayrī reports which state that Ḥudayth was the intermediary for the Imam, and acting as the one “with whom the Shi‘a seek succor,” though the assertion that she was a *bāb*-like figure issuing the Child

their practice of assigning terms of familial relationship to describe initiatory relationships and spiritual hierarchies. Friedman, for example, glosses the word “son” here as meaning “disciple.” Yaron Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 8. A greater problem with attempting to build an argument on a single report like this is simply that we have only a single text of the *Hidāya* (given that both published editions appear to have been taken from an identical manuscript), and it is full of errors. That being said, the succession to the mediatory role of Ibn Nuṣayr would seem to be of central importance, and I can find no other candidate among the historical figures in the *Hidāya* that would supply an alternative explanation to this genealogy. In addition, the mediatory role of the Envoys is clearly present in Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya*, to which is devoted a separate sub-chapter after the chapters on the *bābs*.

¹⁰³ Friedman explains that the *bāb* is the second emanation from the *ma‘nā*, the divine principle, though it must be noted that the exact relation between the various principles of divinity varies in different versions presented in different texts. According to the principle of *siyāqa* (transition) divinity manifested itself in human history through the higher aspects of divinity appearing through their lower emanations. Thus, the essence of the Imam would appear through the *bāb*. Friedman *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 15, 77, 79, 80.

¹⁰⁴ This lends credence to Klemm’s skepticism about the historicity of the first Envoy’s status, but suggests that the second Envoy was indeed a historical figure recognized well before Ṭūsī. I will return to this in the following chapters.

Imam's rescripts is not corroborated elsewhere. At the very least, these reports reflect an early understanding of the post-Ḥasan era which was probably circulating in more than one of the community's many micro-climates. This can be seen from the fact that these reports conflict with later canonical accounts of the history of spiritual authority in both Twelver¹⁰⁵ and Nuṣayrī traditions,¹⁰⁶ and therefore are likely to originate in early arguments regarding the nature of the transmission of spiritual authority after the death of the Eleventh Imam which were independently preserved.

It was partly through Ḥudayth's counter-claim to the property and spiritual legacy of the Imam that Ja'far was prevented from asserting his claim to the Imamate. Again, we must emphasize that the Imamate was an institution whose authority was not vested exclusively in the body of the Imam, but was also diffused amongst associated spaces and institutions – including the Imam's house,¹⁰⁷ and certain physical items that were held to be passed down from one Imam to the next.¹⁰⁸ While Ḥudayth must have commanded considerable power and respect, her role as intermediary did not become part of the canonical narrative of later Twelver literature, beyond the residues extant in the reports I have cited above, which were preserved largely because of their utility as evidence supporting the existence of the Twelfth Imam. The reason Ḥudayth did not become an important figure in the later Twelver pantheon associated with the

¹⁰⁵ Which was superseded by the idea of immediate appointment of the Envoys, see the following chapter.

¹⁰⁶ A detailed history of the conception of practical spiritual authority among the Nuṣayrīs in this period remains to be written, but it is clear from Friedman's remarks regarding the development of the idea of the 'Divine Triad' (*Nuṣayrī- 'Alawīs*, 73-81) and the transmission of spiritual knowledge from the time of Ibn Nuṣayr to Khaṣībī (*Nuṣayrī- 'Alawīs*, 14-19) that no lasting position in the sequence of spiritual leaders, or in the pantheons of the Nuṣayrīs was ultimately granted to Ḥudayth, whatever her early importance those of Khaṣībī's co-religionists who provided him with his source material.

¹⁰⁷ For example, the sources regularly use the same word, *dār*, to connote both the physical house and the central institution of the Imam's sacral-financial network which collected tithes in the Imam's name.

¹⁰⁸ For a description of the early Shi'ī conception of *waṣiyya*, including the transmission of physical items like swords, turbans and, of course, books, see Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors," 45-51.

ghayba was partly due to the estimation that it was problematic that she was a woman.¹⁰⁹ It is likely that she had some scholarly supporters, for, as we have seen, some hadith-based doctrinal argumentation had been generated in her favor, founded on the analogy between her and Zaynab. A more important obstacle to Ḥudayth's full assumption into the Twelver canon of intermediaries was that her claim to be intermediary to the hidden Child Imam eventually came to conflict with the conceptual mechanisms of legitimation for the Second Envoy, Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, which we will discuss in detail in the following chapter. In order to underwrite Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī's creation of the office of Envoy, it was eventually required that his father should have a monopoly upon the honor of being the first direct intermediary to the Twelfth Imam, thus requiring the displacement of Ḥudayth.¹¹⁰ Ḥudayth's initial prominence in the community after Ḥasan's death, is indicative of the fact that the *wakīls* were not yet in a position to fill the power vacuum.¹¹¹

As we have seen in regard to the dating of the inheritance dispute, the events of Ḥudayth's life are hard to pin down, and there is no clear evidence that suggests a date for her death. Given Ḥudayth's initial importance, it would be of tremendous interest to establish the dating of her tenure in authority. This would allow us to understand more fully the dynamics that shaped the struggle after her, including the failure of Jaʿfar and the rise of the *wakīls*. However, throughout the early days of the *ghayba* era, dating remains murky. There is little in the sources that can help us. Evidence regarding the inheritance dispute suggested that it was resolved between four months to seven years after al-Ḥasan's death in 260/874, with two years later being the most common suggestion. The report from Ḥakīma quoted above also corroborates that

¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, Jaʿfar is also depicted in one report as having a female *bāb*. See Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 293-4 and below.

¹¹⁰ See the discussion of the ʿAmrīs in the following chapters.

¹¹¹ We will deal with the rise of the *wakīls* in the following chapter.

Ḥudayth was still alive in 262/876.¹¹² Modarressi places death of Ja‘far at 281/894-5¹¹³ so that would give us a *terminus ante quem* for the death of Ḥudayth, for we see clearly in the sources that she died before him. While this is still unsatisfactory, it does give us a certain window within which these events were taking place, and the initial legacy of the *ghayba* era was determined, before Ḥudayth’s incipient mediation was replaced by the *wakīls* who would then appropriate the basic conception of the structure of mediation with the hidden Child Imam established during the Ḥudayth years, and harnessing it to the greater institutional power of the *wikāla* network. As is suggested from the pilgrimage report above, Ḥudayth was used as a reference point for dating events within the Imami community, and in this sense we are justified in seeing the first decade or so after the death of al-‘Askarī as being the ‘Era of Ḥudayth,’ or the ‘Era of the Grandmother.’

4.4.2. Al-Ḥasan’s aunt, and Ḥudayth’s ally: Ḥakīma/Khadīja

In addition to acting as spokesperson in support of Ḥudayth’s claims to being the intermediary of the Imam, as seen in the report above, al-Ḥasan’s paternal aunt, Ḥakīma¹¹⁴ (sometimes referred to as Khadīja) appears prominently in reports that to provide evidence for the birth of the Child Imam. In various reports she is depicted as having been present on the night of the Child Imam’s birth,¹¹⁵ and in one report, she is even presented as acting as a matchmaker engineering the union between al-Ḥasan and the concubine Narjis which would result in the birth of the Child Imam.¹¹⁶ She is credited in a report from the Nuṣayrī tradition as having been responsible for raising the child Imam. In this report, a certain Mūsā b. Maḥdī al-Jawharī goes to visit the al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī in the year 255/868-9 and asks him to name the

¹¹² See above.

¹¹³ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 83.

¹¹⁴ Ṭūsī transmits that Ḥakīma was the daughter of the Ninth Imam, Muḥammad al-Jawād, and therefore the sister of the Tenth Imam, Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 145.

¹¹⁵ See Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 145-7.

¹¹⁶ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 264.

birthdate of the Twelfth Imam, and al-Ḥasan names his birthdate. The Imam says, “his mother is Narjis and I will accept him, [i.e. recognize the child as a legitimate heir] and Ḥakīma, my paternal aunt will raise him.”¹¹⁷ In this report, then, a clear association is drawn between the identity of the mother of the Twelfth Imam, and the role of al-‘Askarī’s aunt as caregiver to the Child Imam, who is thus provided with care from a suitably prestigious member of the family of the Imams, in addition to his somewhat anonymous mother. In another report also in the *Hidāya*, however, Ḥakīma is depicted as being as perplexed about his whereabouts as anyone.¹¹⁸

It is worth noting that Ḥakīma/Khadīja is associated both with the Imam’s household in Samarra¹¹⁹ as well as Medina, as seen above. Perhaps this is not unsurprising, for though, as a daughter of ‘Alī al-Hādī, the Tenth Imam, she would have gone to Samarra when her father was compelled to, she might have been able to move freely between Samarra and Medina, as Ḥudayth seemed also to do. The ability to move between the inner circle of the Imam and the ‘Alids based in Medina was a luxury perhaps not so freely granted to the men of the family who were often perceived as a threat by the ‘Abbasid authorities. This mobility might have represented a political advantage following the death of al-‘Askarī.

Setting historical speculation aside, however, Ḥakīma/Khadīja functions in the early reports largely as a witness to the birth of the Child Imam – and is particularly associated with the claim that he was born during the lifetime of al-Ḥasan, whereas Ḥudayth is associated (albeit only in one source) with the posthumous pregnancy. It is unclear how and why this evidentiary

¹¹⁷ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 249.

¹¹⁸ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 264-267.

¹¹⁹ If she was understood to be the carer of the Twelfth Imam, the assumption must have been she lived in Samarra. In another report, the women of a family who have a sick baby go to Ḥakīma for help to intercede for the baby, and she procures them a stylus used to administer collyrium for al-Ḥasan’s son which then has miraculous properties and cures the sick baby. In this report, then Ḥakīma is again associated with the childcare of the Twelfth Imam, during his father’s life, and is depicted as based in Samarra, at the house of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. *Kamāl*, 2: 297, h47.

role developed for Ḥakīma/Khadīja in the *ghayba* literature, for it seems unlikely that she herself supported claims that the Child Imam was born before al-Ḥasan's death, or that she was his nurse, given that her own words contradict this in a more convincing report¹²⁰ in which she claims herself to have only been informed of the existence of the child in writing.

Instead, her inclusion in these reports is perhaps more due to the propensity for pantheon-making among the generators of the *ghayba*-literature. Ḥakīma/Khadīja might well have supported the existence of the Child Imam, and substantiated this by mentioning a letter from al-Ḥasan during his life, presumably delivered to her in Medina. Once placed in this evidentiary role, she was the object of the growth of more satisfyingly amplified traditions regarding the precise details of the Child Imam's birth.

4.4.3. The concubine and the phantom pregnancy

Apart from Ḥudayth, another set of figures appear in the earliest Occultation-era reports as autonomous intermediaries for the Child Imam: an alliance between a concubine and a servant who had been close to the Eleventh Imam. As we have seen above, it has been suggested that Ḥudayth herself orchestrated the phantom pregnancy of al-Ḥasan's concubine. However, the concubine-mother of the Imam is most often associated, not with Ḥudayth, but with other figures in the reports: a male servant known as 'Aqīd or Badr, and in some reports al-'Askarī's aunt, Ḥakīma.¹²¹ These figures are significant both because they might reflect possible historical factions within the opposition to Ja'far, but also for the formation of doctrine afterwards. The

¹²⁰ Where two reports exist, and one makes claims that are more convenient to later canonical narratives, it seems a good rule of thumb to assume that the less convenient report is the earlier, and perhaps more reliable. In the case of Ḥakīma claiming that she was informed of the child's existence by writing, it would appear strange for this report to have been generated if there had already been reports circulating that placed her as an eyewitness to the birth of the Child Imam.

¹²¹ See above.

concubine mother was ultimately absorbed into canonical Twelver doctrine as providing the identity of the mother of the Hidden Imam.

The claim for the posthumous pregnancy of al-Ḥasan's concubine is likely to have been the original claim for the existence of a Child Imam. By the time Nawbakhtī (d. between 300/912-3 and 310/922-3), was writing his heresiography in 286/899, the supporters of the posthumous pregnancy were by no means in the ascendant, but they still appeared to have been active. The groups which Nawbakhtī describes as having supported the existence of a Child Imam, were internally split according to those who believed the Child Imam had been born during al-Ḥasan's life, and those who believed he had been born posthumously. We can detect material associated with both groups within the patchwork of the canonical sources. The concubine's claim for posthumous pregnancy appears to have been common knowledge – a stable fact that had to be incorporated or explained away by the accounts that deal with this period. Thus, as Nawbakhtī notes, the sect who maintain that the posthumous pregnancy was real, and that the Child Imam was born eight months after al-Ḥasan's death argued that the pregnancy was “established, manifest, verified by the authorities and with the rest of the people, and the division of the inheritance was prevented on account of it.” Thus they seem to be arguing that the knowledge of the pregnancy claim, at least, was widespread, even if other groups claimed that it was a phantom. And, indeed, it does seem that even narratives hostile to the idea are concerned with explaining the fact of this posthumous pregnancy, for no source appears to deny that such a claim had been made. A number of distinct positions emerge:

- The concubine was clearly pregnant, and she gave birth to the Child Imam in secret.¹²²

¹²² Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 85.

- Another woman continued to be pregnant, and will give birth at some time in the future.¹²³
- The posthumous pregnancy was a phantom pregnancy, and the authorities watched the concubine until it was proved to be false.¹²⁴
- The posthumous pregnancy was a phantom pregnancy, but the concubine's deception was made out of pure motives, as she claimed that in order to protect the Child Imam who had been born earlier.¹²⁵

The latter claim appears to be a rehabilitation of the reputation of the concubine, allowing her character to remain untarnished, despite the assertion that her pregnancy was a phantom and the Child Imam was born at a different time. This version perhaps even preserved the possibility that it was the same woman who concocted the deception as who had previously given birth to the Child Imam. This sequence appears to represent the gradual unification of different groups around commonly accepted principles. The concern of many reports to provide an explanation of the phantom pregnancy suggests that the groups who took the pregnancy of the concubine seriously were at some point central to the entire claim that a Child Imam had been born, and that their understanding of history could not just be dismissed.

The centrality of the concubine to the genesis of the idea of the Child Imam is corroborated by the fact that, despite the fact that the posthumous pregnancy claim was ultimately rejected by Twelver orthodoxy in favor of a birth during his father's lifetime, nonetheless, the name of the Child Imam's mother is usually accepted to be either *Şaqīl* or

¹²³ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 85-6.

¹²⁴ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 503-6.

¹²⁵ *Kamāl*, 475-6.

Narjis, the name associated with the concubine who claimed the posthumous pregnancy.¹²⁶ This suggests that at some point the name became common currency, and was disconnected from the claims associated with its original context, as a canonical narrative gradually was synthesized from the materials generated in this period of chaotic contestation. Thus the names Ṣaḡīl and Narjis both come to be associated both with the woman who gave birth before al-Ḥasan's death, and also with the woman who gave birth afterwards.

The figure of the concubine is depicted in several sources as having continued to live in the Shi'ī community. In many reports she is depicted as living for a couple of years under 'Abbasid supervision. These reports again point to a dating of 262/876 for the concubine's surveillance at the pleasure of the Caliph.¹²⁷ In another report, the surveillance is conducted while the concubine was living in the care of an 'Alid for some years, and yet another report suggests that she died around the turn of the century.¹²⁸ The image that appears from these reports then, is of a couple of years of uncertainty regarding the concubine's state, after which she might have lived in the community for another couple of decades. It is unclear whether these reflect historical details, or later doctrine-making. The concubine's continued residence among the community does not seem entirely compatible with the confusion surrounding her role as potential mother to the Imam. Certainly by the time the *ghayba* theory was beginning to be crystallized under the supervision of the *wakīls*, she must already be out of the picture, for the ambiguity surrounding her pregnancy could not be resolved by recourse to her own witness. No reports survive which present an eyewitness account from the concubine herself, but instead they are most often associated with a figure like 'Aqīd/Badr the Servant.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Hussain, *Occultation*, 67.

¹²⁷ See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473-4, and 476 and above

¹²⁸ See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 79, for a summary of these reports.

4.4.4. The concubine-eunuch alliance and their roles as intermediaries to the Child Imam

Given the centrality of the concubine to some conceptions of the Imamate of the Twelfth Imam, it will not surprise us to see that this was developed by some accounts into what appears to be a theory of her intermediary status. We have seen above that al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī washed his body in preparation for death with the assistance of ‘Aqīd the Eunuch and Ṣaqīl the Concubine.¹²⁹ This report suggests that these two were in some way associated with claims to the legacy of the Imam. The pairing of a male servant – perhaps a eunuch – and a concubine mother of the Twelfth Imam recurs in various reports in the *ghayba* literature. In Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, ‘Aqīd the Eunuch is one of the witnesses who testifies to the date of the birth of the Twelfth Imam. In doing so he is paired with Ṣaqīl and names her as the mother of the Child Imam.¹³⁰ This might indicate an internal alliance within the household of the Imam, between the servant and the concubine, or it might suggest the later creation of a pantheon of characters involved in the Child Imam’s early life. There are many more stories of servants from the household of the Imam providing eyewitness evidence for the birth of the Twelfth Imam.¹³¹ There also appears a significant topos of a servant meeting a believer and secretly leading them to a face-to-face encounter with the Imam.¹³² This topos is most highly developed in the Nuṣayrī tradition represented by Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya*. In most Twelver reports the concubine mother is known as Ṣaqīl, who is usually called Narjis in the *Hidāya*. In the Nuṣayrī tradition, the concubine mother appears in a clearly defined intermediary role, in collaboration with a servant. This servant is known as ‘Aqīd in Twelver tradition as we have seen, and in the Nuṣayrī *Hidāya*, a figure

¹²⁹ See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 473-4, and above.

¹³⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl* 474-5. This report is transmitted both by the high-*wakīl* Ḥājiz b. Washshā’, and by the theologian Abu Sahl Ibn Nawbakht, suggesting strong supporters for this formulation of the birth.

¹³¹ See, for example, Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:514-15; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 435-6; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 268 (in which the servant is named Nasīm).

¹³² Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:519-20.

fulfilling an identical function in the narratives is named Badr.¹³³ In the *Hidāya*, Badr appears in slightly different roles in various reports. In some, Badr appears as the pre-eminent *bāb* or intermediary for the hidden Imam himself. For example, in one story, dated to 262/876 a certain Abū Muḥammad ‘Īsā b. Maḥdī al-Jawharī al-Junbulānī goes on Ḥajj with the explicit aim of inquiring after the identity of the Imam at the Imams’ ancestral seat of Ṣuryā near Medina. When he goes there, Badr appears and leads him through to an encounter with the hidden Imam, along with various mystical and miraculous occurrences.¹³⁴ In the next report, Badr appears to be the intermediary working on behalf of the mother of the Imam, Narjis, in Samarra, rather than operating in direct contact with the Imam himself. However, Badr appears to have considerable authority, and is seen as having messengers working under him in something like a *wikāla*-style organization, receiving notes and dispensing statements and monetary gifts:

حدثني أبو جعفر محمد بن موسى القمي ، قال : خرجت إلى سامرا مع ابن احمد الشيعياني وكتبت رقعة إلى السيدة نرجس (عليها السلام) أعرفها بقدمي لزيارة مولاي (عليه السلام) وأنفذتها مع بدر الخادم المعروف بابي الحر فانصرفت ... فجنث إلى بدر فعرفته علي بن أحمد ومذهبه واعلمته انه يريد يكتب رقعة واني أردت ان استأذن له فقال لي : تعود إلي بعد هذا الوقت فانصرفت فجاءني رسول الخادم فسرت إليه وعلي بن أحمد قال : اكتب بما تريد فكتبت رقعة اسال فيها الدعاء وانصرفنا فلما كان بالعشي جاءني رسول الخادم فسرنا إليه جميعا فدفعت إليه رقعة . فدعا له فيها ودفع إليه ستة دراهم وقيل له رصع منها الخواتم

Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Qummī said: I went out to Samarra with Ibn Aḥmad al-Shu‘aybānī [sic – probably Shaybānī] and I wrote a note to Lady Narjis (AS) informing her of my coming for a pilgrimage to my Lord (*mawlāya*) (AS) [i.e. the Imam]

¹³³ Ibn Bābūya always refers to the concubine who claimed to be the mother of the Twelfth Imam as Ṣaqīl, and, on the whole, presents reports that undermine her claim. Khaṣībī, on the other hand, only reproduces her name as Narjis. This suggests that the same ideas, after initially being produced within the same group, then circulated in isolated millieux, perhaps after a more or less decisive Nuṣayrī split off from the other Twelvers.

¹³⁴ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 281-2.

and I sent it with Badr the Eunuch (*al-khādim*) known as Abū Ḥurr, then I returned... Then I came to Badr and I introduced him to ‘Alī b. Aḥmad and his religious persuasion (*madhhab*). And I informed [Badr] that he wanted to write a note [to send to the Imam], and that I wanted to ask [Badr’s] permission [for that]. So he said to me, “Return to me after this time.” So I went back, and the messenger of [Badr] the Eunuch came to me, and I travelled to him, and ‘Alī b. Aḥmad said, “Write about what you want.” So I wrote a note asking for a prayer of petition (*du‘ā*) and we turned back, and when it was evening time, the messenger of [Badr] the Eunuch came, and we went to him together, and I gave him a note in which he asked his petition and [the messenger] gave six dirhams to [‘Alī b. Aḥmad], and he was told, “Adorn some rings with them.”¹³⁵

In this account then, Narjis is in the place of an intermediary between the community and the Child Imam. The Imam’s followers know that it is to Narjis that they should direct their communications. The complex to-and-fro with notes, money and gifts in this report is familiar from earlier reports from the lives of the Imams, and later reports regarding the operation of the sacral-financial *wikāla*-network under the high-*wakīls* in the name of the hidden Imam. The necessity for Muḥammad b. Mūsā to introduce ‘Alī b. Aḥmad by name and by religious orientation indicates that they are operating in a secretive context that was familiar to Imamis during the days of the manifest Imams, but which was probably heightened by the mutual distrust effected by the splintering of the Imami community after the crisis of succession. Badr is clearly presented here in a position of pre-eminent importance in the practical conduct of relations with the community, and it is to him that permission is directed regarding the communication with the Imam. Narjis is initially important in the narrative, but all the business devolves upon Badr.

¹³⁵ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 281.

In another report, a servant, unnamed other than being called “the Eunuch” is depicted as operating out of the house of the Imam in Samarra, and high-handedly turning away pilgrims:

علي بن أحمد الواسطي انه سار إلى العسكر واتى الدار ووقف ببابه مستأذنا عليه يسأله عن مسائل كان يسأل عنها سيدنا أبا الحسن وأبا محمد (عليهما السلام) فخرج إليه الخادم فقال له : ما اسمك قال اسمي علي بن أحمد . الواسطي فقال انصرف أنت لا اذن لك .

‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī said that he travelled to Samarra (*al-‘askar*) and came to the house of the Imam and stopped at its gate, asking for permission from him, and asking him about questions which he had asked of our Sayyid Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī] and Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] and The Eunuch (*al-khādim*) came out to him and said to him, "what is your name?" He said, "My name is ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī, and he said, "Turn back! You do not have permission."¹³⁶

It is not clear that this is the same servant as that known as Badr or ‘Aqīd, but he does appear to be operating in a similar role as the main intermediary for the Imam, in a similar way to Badr in the reports above: permission is requested from this servant to initiate communications with the Imam. This report is tantalizing in its suggestion of a hostile relationship between those operating from within the Imam’s house, and a pilgrim who wants to ask too many questions.¹³⁷

It is also tempting to identify the ‘Alī b. Aḥmad in this report with the ‘Alī b. Aḥmad in the report cited above, perhaps suggesting the figure who transmitted the Badr-Narjis traditions for posterity. What is certain, however, is that again, the servant figure is portrayed with significant authority, operating from the establishment of the Imam, benefiting from the guise of continuity

¹³⁶ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 290.

¹³⁷ We will deal more below with the role of the dispersed Shi‘i community in determining the outcome of the crisis of succession through the insistence upon the criterion of the knowledge of the Imam.

in the ritual procedure of bringing money to the house of the Imam, even after the death of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī.

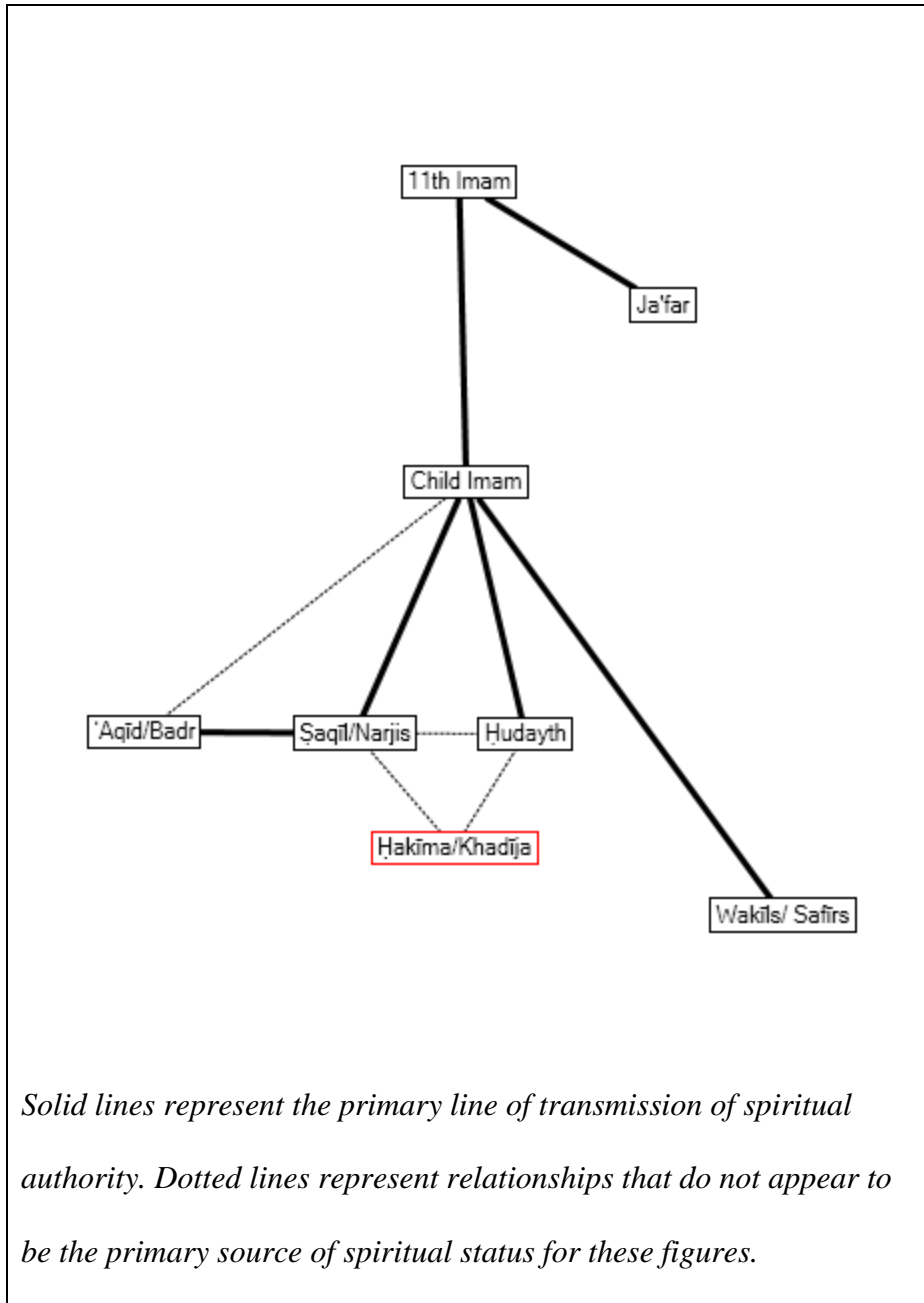
While the historicity of the individual accounts cannot be assumed, it is certainly plausible that a servant-like figure might indeed have held an important role of intermediary authority as suggested in these reports in the *Hidāya*. How then do reports of the servant-concubine intermediaries fit with the evidence that Ḥudayth, the mother of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī was in possession of the house of the Imam following his death, and was the first person to operate in a role of mediation with the Child Imam? Were figures like the concubine Ṣaqīl/Narjis and an influential servant like ‘Aqīd/Badr allied, or opposed to Ḥudayth? Perhaps they represent an alliance that exploited the idea of the Child Imam. Perhaps the servant-concubine alliance operated surreptitiously or at a distance from Ḥudayth’s notice, or perhaps they only made their claims after her death. It is also possible these names and their actions were generated by groups which were sufficiently separated from events – (whether in time, space, or by their epistemological-hermeneutical methods) to allow for the propagation of reports that had little factual basis. Nonetheless, the presence of these reports suggests a political and doctrinal movement associated with the servant-concubine alliance which was strong enough to propagate its reports and project them into posterity, via the Twelver and, in particular, the Nuṣayrī sources.

4.4.5. Overview of the early opposition to Ja‘far

As we have seen, then, there were a number of figures in this early period whose claims to spiritual authority were predicated upon their association with the Child Imam. Contradictory evidence for his existence was generated in different ways and by different groups who argued for slightly different structures of mediation between the Imam and the community. It is likely that the phantom pregnancy of the concubine Ṣaqīl/Narjis was the earliest claim made which

suggested that there was a Child Imam to succeed al-Ḥasan. As a result, echoes of the association with the concubine mother survive as a part of *all* of the claims made to be intermediaries to the Child Imam in this period before the rise of the *wakīls*:

Figure 2: Claims to the spiritual legacy of the Imam



It seems unlikely that the centrality of the concubine mother would have established itself in the literature unless it were an early claim. In addition, the circumstances surrounding the concubine's phantom pregnancy are too messy to have been generated by a simple need to provide evidence for the existence of the Child Imam. This also gives the impression that the

phantom pregnancy was an early event that really did shape responses to the question of succession, and which was tidied up and incorporated into the canonical narratives that were forged during the tenure of the high-*wakīls/Envoys* and after.

While there can be no certainty about the historicity of the reports about servants and concubines, we cannot ignore the clear fact that there exist among our sources a discernable cluster of reports that suggest alliances between members of the inner circle of the domestic household of the Imam; servants and concubines based in the house in Samarra, and al-Ḥasan's mother and aunt. All of these figures have associations with both Samarra, where the Imam died, and Medina, where the family of the Imams were based before the Tenth and Eleventh Imams were compelled to attend the 'Abbasid court in Samarra.

Notably, the *wakīls* themselves appear in somewhat ambivalent relationships with the concubine, the servant and the mother of the Eleventh Imam. The *wakīls* do not directly mention her, though in our sources, accounts that suggest the mediatory role of the concubine, the servant and the mother of the Imam are bundled together with accounts that document the mediatory role of the *wakīls* as if they were all part of the same phenomenon. This bundling of disparate positions into a synthesized account of early *ghayba*-era history was part of the work that produced Twelver synthesis.

A large portion of the contents of our reports are clearly later representations of the earliest days of political maneuvering which employ stock figures from within the household of the Imam as polemical tools, eventually uniting the concubine, the mother and the aunt together as key personalities in the pantheon of those associated with the birth and care of the Twelfth Imam. Clearly, however there were great differences about how these figures were employed by the different groups who converged upon the belief in a child of al-Ḥasan as Imam. For some the

concubine Narjis-Şaqīl is seen as the true mother of the Imam, for some she is an imposter. For some Ḥudayth is associated with this imposture, for her own ends, for others she was the true representative of the child Imam. In another formulation, Narjis/Şaqīl is herself the intermediary to her son, the Imam, supported by a servant ‘Aqīd/Badr, or sometimes ‘Aqīd/Badr is depicted as himself the Imam’s direct intermediary. This kind of disjunction suggests the wide information gap between the inner circle of the Imam and the rest of the community. While there was a rule of secrecy within the inner circle of the Imam during the period in which conflicts over the nature of the succession to the Eleventh Imam were resolved, the rest of the community, acting at a remove from the political maneuvering within the household and family of the Imam, were more likely to fill in the gaps in information with rumor and speculation, or according to their own distinctive cosmological systems. It also makes clear that whatever maneuverings we may discern at this early stage were not unified. Though it is quite possible that various different alliances were made between figures like Ḥakīma, Ḥudayth and the servants and concubines of the inner circle, they did not produce any long-term institutional footprint, but came to be folded into the creation myths of the embryonic Twelver community, later on, when more permanent institutions had emerged from the chaos.¹³⁸

Certainly, however, any alliances between the Imam’s household, and his mother and aunt were broadly anti-Ja‘far, and may have benefited from some support from the authorities against Ja‘far. This seems especially likely in the case of Ḥudayth whose claim to the inheritance was initially upheld by the *qāḍī*. The involvement Ibn al-Mutawakkil with the funerary rituals, and the role of the authorities in supervising the phantom pregnancy also indicate ‘Abbasid

¹³⁸ Their role in the standard Twelver account becomes stripped of the complexities and nuance, and is reduced to the fact of corroboration of the existence of the Twelfth Imam.

interest in the internal politics of the ʿAlid family. All the implicit claims to the status of intermediary to the Child Imam analyzed above appear to pre-date, and to some extent, conflict with, the later intermediary claims of the *wakīls*, but they all share the common assumption that Jaʿfar was not the Imam, and that the Imam was not visibly involved in public life at all. In this sense they are doctrinally united by the conception of the cessation of manifest Imamate in direct contradiction of the claims of Jaʿfar. It must be emphasized that these opposition groups regarded themselves as mutually exclusive positions, as can be seen in the heresiographer Nawbakhtī’s list of sects, made around the turn of the fourth/tenth century. In this list, groups that would appear to share common principles of belief in a Child Imam to succeed to al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, instead appear to be sharply divided by polemic. It was only later in the fourth/tenth century that common principles of unity between these groups were forged under the leadership of the *wakīls*, and then drawn together by the great hadith compilers Kulaynī and Ibn Bābūya, and Khaṣībī in the Nuṣayrī tradition, to form the myth of an early consensus about the existence of the Child Imam, at least among the inner circle of family members, servants, and the *wakīls* closest to the Imam.

4.5. Doctrines of non-alignment, and the wider search for an Imam

As we have mentioned, the *wakīl* agents loyal to the Eleventh Imam were always visible in the political and doctrinal wranglings of the first days, months and years after the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, though they do not appear in our sources as, for example, taking a direct role in the disputes between Jaʿfar and Ḥudayth and the inheritance. Many *wakīls* must have aligned themselves with one or other of the potential options who claimed the Eleventh Imam’s legacy in different ways, including Jaʿfar, Ḥudayth, the servant-concubine alliance, and the Child Imam

whose presence they vouched for.¹³⁹ Many *wakīls* however, must have felt the perplexity of much of the community, and would have kept themselves aloof from getting involved in the messy politics of the succession until a clear candidate for the Imamate emerged. This position of non-alignment presented as one of the thirteen or fourteen factions after the death of the eleventh Imam by the heresiographer Nawbakhtī, who explains that when they are asked to say whether the Imam is Ja‘far or someone else, they would say, “We do not know,” but rather reserve judgement, “until the matter is clear for us.”¹⁴⁰

Increasingly, however, it became clear that Ja‘far, at least, would not be acceptable as a candidate, because of his feud with al-Ḥasan, his unsuitable personality, and because of his failure to maneuver through the first pivotal challenges that faced him. As the opposition against Ja‘far organized itself, it became less tenable to stand on the fence about whether or not Ja‘far was the Imam. Starting from the first hours after the Eleventh Imam’s death, and growing over the next few years, the opposition to Ja‘far sought a unifying doctrine to allow for the development of a consensus and put aside the dangerous rifts. The opposition was initially unified by some version of this formula: “We reject the idea that Ja‘far must be the Imam. We do not know where the true Imam is, but we know with certainty that there must be an Imam, so he must be in hiding somewhere.”¹⁴¹ While the *wakīls*, like many of the Imami community, could not initially find unity on questions of who the Imam was, where he was and who his official

¹³⁹ Most of these early alignments have been lost, though the ambiguities in the careers of Ḥājiz (who appears to support Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ in at least one report) and Ibn Mahziyār (who doubted in the Hidden Imam and the Occultation faction, but then his doubt was said to have been cleared up) give us a sense of the fluidity of the allegiances of the *wakīls* in the perplexing early days. See Chapters 5 and 7.

¹⁴⁰ See Nawbakhti, 89-90, also quoted in full below.

¹⁴¹ This common-sense style of reasoning is then followed by the systematic theological formulation that starts by establishing the necessity of a *ḥujja* in all ages, and proceeds eventually to the proof that the Imam must exist and must be a son of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, born and living in hiding. See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 125.

mouthpiece was, this kind of doctrine provided enough unity to overcome the ambiguity over key events like the funerary rituals, inheritance and the claim for intermediary status. This doctrine of non-aligned assertion of the Imam's existence increasingly found theological expression.

In the meantime, while the factional rivalries intensified amongst the core of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī household and family, his followers throughout the Shiʿi world began the search to identify who was the Imam after him. The search for the Imam consequently appears as a dominant topos within the literature of the early *ghayba*. The basic elements of this topos are that the protagonist expresses doubt or anxiety about the Imam, and then he questions the people around him, but the unsatisfactory nature of the answers he receives prompts him to go on a journey to various parts of the Shiʿi world to search for clues as to the identity and whereabouts of the Imam. These stories of the search for the Imam often end up with the description of an ecstatic encounter with the Imam -- usually in Samarra or the Hijaz. Many of these stories involve someone coming from the East (Balkh, Qumm, Rayy, Nishapur) to Iraq (Kufa, Baghdad Samarra), though some involve seekers from Egypt and Iraq itself. A clear subset involve Ḥajj stories and/or seeking the Imam in his ancestral home of Medina, and these are intermingled with hadith traced back to earlier Imams that provide precedents for seeing the Imam while on Ḥajj. This suggests that some of these reports are older hadith that were re-purposed for the new crisis. In particular the hadith type that involves the Imam being spotted on Ḥajj has clear precedents that lead back to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and state that “When you go on Ḥajj, the Imam sees you, but you do not see him.”¹⁴² Nonetheless, we must not assume that this literary backdrop precludes the possibility that many of these reports recount actual experiences. In the circumstances of

¹⁴² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 440.

crisis and perplexity, material generated by dreams, ecstatic visions and speculation, and magnified and distributed by rumor, would have provided important mechanisms for producing meaning for the new epoch. Some of these would have been produced within a milieu associated with the claims of a particular doctrinal response to the crisis, and others would have been employed later in order to substantiate particular claims.

The approach of Comparative Shi'ism is also illuminating in understanding the search for an Imam, for we also have a number of reports that deal with a similar topos of travel in search of the truth, which, however, lead ultimately to conversion away from Twelver Shi'ism. For example the narrative of the conversion of the Ismaili *dā'ī* from Kufa, Ibn Ḥawshab in *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa*¹⁴³ demonstrates the ubiquity of the searching for an Imam amongst Imamis at this period, and the possibility that this search could easily lead beyond the crisis-ridden proto-Twelver context towards the claims of a charismatic Imam with an active mission.

4.6. Ja'far's troubles

4.6.1. The difficulty of creating a viable network

While Ja'far was not able to convert the advantage of his lineage into a position of supreme authority among the Imamis, the movement in his support, and then in support of his son as his successor did continue for many years, including after his death and well into the fourth/tenth century. Why then, did this movement fail to perpetuate itself? While we cannot follow the fate of Ja'far's followers beyond the fourth/tenth century, we can investigate some of the internal difficulties that Ja'far faced in his attempt to create a viable movement in support of his Imamate. As we have seen, Ja'far's followers subscribed to a variety of beliefs, from the

¹⁴³ Abū Ḥanīfa Nu'mān b. Muḥammad, *Founding the Fatimid State. The Rise of an Early Islamic Empire: an Annotated English Translation of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's Iftitāḥ al-Da'wa*, translated by Hamid Haji (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 21-26.

moderate, to the more hermeneutically radical. This was partly due to the very nature of the Imami community, and it was the common task of new Imams to forge unity between the disparate hermeneutic and ritual communities beneath the symbolic umbrella of his leadership.

Ja‘far’s bid to become a mainstream candidate for the Imamate, was, as we have seen, clearly supported by many moderate Imamates. But it was problematized by his the nature of his original support base drawn from the supporters of the renegade *wakīl* Fāris b. Ḥātim, whose mechanisms of justification for their Imam contradicted even Ja‘far’s own statements.

In his *Hidāya*, Khaṣībī mentions some of the variety in the beliefs of Ja‘far’s followers, including a group that believed that Ja‘far had been the *bāb* of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad, taking up that position only after the death of the previous *bāb*, Fāris b. Ḥātim b. Māhūya, who had been the *bāb* to Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad.¹⁴⁴ Was this the original belief of the movement behind Fāris? It would explain the bitterness of the anathema against Fāris. The positioning of Ja‘far in the role of *bāb* is suggestive of the internal needs of a group to subordinate the living claimant to their own schema, including the mechanisms of accession to the Imamate local to the intellectual milieu of that particular group. This is suggestive of Nuṣayrī and proto- Nuṣayrī articulations of the Imamate, which fit historical events into the pre-existing framework of their own cosmology. Even when contradicted by the Imam himself, belief would be maintained

Notably, Kashshī places Fāris and Ibn Nuṣayr in the same biography, suggesting that they made comparable claims to *bāb*-hood,¹⁴⁵ though Ibn Nuṣayr claimed to be the *bāb* of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, and Fāris claimed to be the *bāb* of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad. However, if Fāris claimed that Ja‘far was the Imam after Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad, this is not a position that Ja‘far appears to

¹⁴⁴ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 291-2.

¹⁴⁵ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 369. It is possible, however, that they are placed together merely because they were both cursed by the Tenth Imam.

have publically endorsed himself. According to Khaṣībī's report, Ja'far publically stated that he was the *waṣī* of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī,¹⁴⁶ thereby potentially alienating the original core of his support base, who traced their allegiance to Ja'far through the supporters of Fāris who were hostile to al-Ḥasan. Further instances of the unorthodoxy of those who supported Ja'far in the tradition of Fāris is provided by a report in the *Hidāya* that relates a debate between Khaṣībī himself and Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Thawāba and Abū 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Jamāl in Ibn Thawāba's house in Baghdad on the eastern side of 'Askar al-Mahdī. In this meeting Thawāba and al-Jamāl claimed that Ja'far was designated through the following unorthodox chain of succession: al-Hādī designated his son Abū Ja'far Muḥammad as his successor; Fāris b. Ḥātim claimed that he was the *bāb* of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad; and Ja'far claimed that he was the *bāb* of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad after Fāris b. Ḥātim. In contrast to other reports in the *Hidāya*, the followers of Ja'far appear as sincere *mutakallims* standing up for their own theology. It also suggests that they belong to a similar *ghulāt* cosmological tradition as Khaṣībī himself, in the prominence they give to the *bābs* of the Imams. In particular, the suggestion that Ja'far was, at first a *bāb*, but was transformed into an Imam later is very unusual, recalling the concept of *siyāqa* of the Nuṣayrī tradition, in which the spiritual essence of one historical figure is believed to have been transferred into another historical figure.¹⁴⁷ In his debate with these followers of Ja'far, Khaṣībī ultimately defeats his opponents, however through his superior knowledge and interpretation of the hadith reports about earlier Imams, rather than through proof of their

¹⁴⁶ I saw 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Faḍḍāl, and he said, "I wrote to Ja'far and I asked him about Abū Muḥammad – who his successor (*waṣī*) is, and he said, "Abū Muḥammad was an Imam to whom obedience was due for the people, and I am his successor (*waṣī*)."" Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 289.

¹⁴⁷ Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 15, 77, 79, 80.

unorthodox beliefs, perhaps suggesting that they were operating with the same cosmological principles.

Khaṣībī cites an unusually long and detailed report transmitted by a certain Abū al-Qāsim b. al-Ṣā'igh al-Balkhī which adds key details to our picture of the followers of Ja'far – in particular the ideas and activities of three men that Nawbakhtī does not mention because they were operating after he wrote his *Firaq*: Abū al-Ḥasan b. Thawāba and his associates, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Jamāl and Abū 'Alī al-Ṣā'igh. The transmitter of this report, Ibn al-Ṣā'igh acts according to the common topos of the believer who travels around gathering information and evidence in search of an Imam to succeed al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī. In Samarra he observes the movements of Ja'far from afar, then attempts to reach him by writing a letter, which he gives to a woman called Umm Abū Sulaymān (the wife of a certain Muḥammad b. Zakariyya al-Rāzī)¹⁴⁸ who was acting as the intermediary – the *bāb* – of Ja'far. This woman transmits letters to and from Ja'far, and arranges a meeting with him for Ibn al-Ṣā'igh. Another intermediary working on behalf of Ja'far is a certain Abū Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb b. Abī Nāfi' al-Madā'inī. In order to test Ja'far's claim, Ibn al-Ṣā'igh sends letters under an assumed name via each of these intermediaries, and manages to gain an audience with Ja'far. Ibn al-Ṣā'igh describes his researches into the identity of the Imam, saying that after al-Hādī died, he went out to Iraq, and met his brethren (*ikhwān*) and found them “all of them together agreed upon Abū Muḥammad [al-'Askarī] apart from the followers of Ibn Māhūya [al-Fāris b. Ḥātim],” and so he declared for Abū Muḥammad. Upon the death of Abū Muḥammad, however, he was thrown into confusion again, and continued his questioning, first in Khurāsān and the Jibāl, where he found his Shi'i

¹⁴⁸ This is a tantalizing detail. Could this be the wife of the famous physician, Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Zakariyya al-Rāzī, known to the Latins as Rhazes who died in 313/925 or 323/935? See L. E. Goodman, “al-Rāzī,” *EI2*.

colleagues riven with dissent, and then in Iraq, where he found people similarly divided. In Baghdad he came across supporters of the claim of Ja‘far, “Abū al-Ḥasan b. Thawāba and his associates (*aṣḥāb*) and Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Jamāl (al-Jammāl?) and Abū ‘Alī al-Ṣā’igh and others.” When he eventually came face-to-face with Ja‘far, Ibn Ṣā’igh told him that Abū al-Ḥasan b. Thawāba and Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Jamāl and Abū ‘Alī al-Ṣā’igh claimed that Ja‘far was the *waṣī* of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī.¹⁴⁹ Ja‘far responds to Ibn al-Ṣā’igh’s confusion and repudiates the claims of these followers:

فقال لعن الله أبا الحسين بن ثوابة وأصحابه فإنهم يكذبون علي ويقولون ما لم أقل ويخدعون الناس ويأكلون أموالهم وقد قطعوا مالا كان لي من ناحية فصار بأيديهم وهاهنا من هو أشد من ابن ثوابة فقلت من جعلت فداك قال القزويني علي بن أحمد فقلت سمعت باسمه وارتدت ان اذهب إليه فقال إياك فإنه كافر وأخاف ان يفتنك ويفسد عليك ما أنت عليه من دينك علي بن أحمد القزويني وأصحابه لعنهم الله والملائكة والناس أجمعون

Then [Ja‘far] said: “May God curse Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Thawāba and his associates, for they lie against me and say what I did not say, and they deceive the people and consume their money, and they have intercepted money that was for me from a fiscal district (*nāḥiya*) which came to their hands, - and here! - who is worse than Ibn Thawāba!?” And I said, “Who? May I be your sacrifice!” He said, “Al-Qazwīnī ‘Alī b. Aḥmad.” And I said, “I have heard of his name, and I wanted to go to him.” He said, “Oh you! Verily he is an infidel, and I fear that he will tempt you and corrupt you in what you are doing in the way of your faith: ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Qazwīnī and his associates – may God and the angels and people all curse them.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Confusingly enough, at another point in this report, Ibn al-Ṣā’igh mentions that they claimed that Ja‘far was the *waṣī* of Abū Muḥammad, but given the context, this must be a mistake, and we should read instead Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad

¹⁵⁰ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 296.

Still Ibn al-Ṣā'igh requires further clarification, and gets Ja'far to say clearly that he is the *waṣī* of Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAskarī, not of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad, and that he is the Imam after him. Then Ibn al-Ṣā'igh raises the problem of the violation of Imami doctrine that would occur if the Imamate should be transmitted between two brothers (other than among the faṭḥites):

فقلت يا سيدي روينا عن آبائك (عليهم السلام) ان الإمامة لا تكون في أخوين بعد الحسن والحسين قال صدقت
بهذا ولكن اتقر بالبداة قلت : نعم قال : فان الله بدا له في ذلك

I said, "Oh my Sayyid, we have transmitted from your fathers (AS) that the Imamate will not go between two brothers after al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn." He said, "You have spoken truly, but do you acknowledge the principle that God can change his mind (*badā*)?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Verily, God changed his mind (*badā lahu*) in that [i.e. He changed his mind about Abū Ja'far Muḥammad being the Imam, in favor of Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAskarī's Imamate].¹⁵¹

This long story about the supporters of Ja'far has a number of interesting aspects. We should take with a pinch of salt the depiction of Ibn Thawāba, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Jamāl, Abū ʿAlī al-Ṣā'igh and ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Qazwīnī, as being insincere, obstinate in their evil, stealing money in the name of Ja'far, but privately undermining him. This kind of obstinate, intentional evil-doing is a stereotypical characteristic of the enemies of the Imams in Imami literature. However, the association of these Ja'farites with al-Fāris b. Ḥātim b. Māhūya al-Qazwīnī, and the insistence upon Ja'far's *waṣīyya*, not from al-ʿAskarī but from Abū Ja'far Muḥammad is illuminating. It suggests that Ja'far was ultimately unable or unwilling to unite the different wings of his supporters. In refusing to countenance the unorthodox claims for his *bāb*-hood,

¹⁵¹ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 296.

Ja‘far alienated a group that had similar beliefs about the nature of *bāb*-hood as the Nuṣayrīs, but, unlike the Nuṣayrīs supported him rather than al-‘Askarī. Correcting for the polemical role of this report, there is no reason for us to accept that these followers of Ja‘far were acting other than according to their sincere conviction.

In addition to the disparate beliefs of Ja‘far’s followers, Ja‘far faced another difficulty that was also shared by his rivals: the difficulty of creating a reliable sacral-financial network to bind his community to him and to provide him with funds with which to demonstrate his divine favor, and to provide patronage to his followers. Following the encounter with Ja‘far depicted in the report above, Ibn al-Ṣā’igh continues to gather information about Ja‘far, and is told by a certain Abū Sulaymān that Ja‘far is in great debt, and receives charity from the Ibn Bashshār, who appears to be an employee of the *naqīb* of the Hashimites and the Ṭālibids. He goes to speak with Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Thawāba and Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Jamāl and Abū ‘Alī al-Ṣā’igh and ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Qazwīnī, who laugh and admit that they took money from Ja‘far – but claimed that it was not Ja‘far’s money, but rather God’s money – implying that Ja‘far is an imposter, so it is legitimate to embezzle money collected in his name. They defend themselves by saying that the true Imams were Abū al-Ḥasan al-Hādī, and Abū Muḥammad al-‘Askarī, and Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī, but not this liar Ja‘far, but instead that the Imam is the *Mahdī* Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan,¹⁵² and that they “only take this money so that people see by this that we are against Ja‘far.” After all his researches, Ibn al-Ṣā’igh and his people all support the Imamate of the child of al-Ḥasan – as indeed you would expect in a Nuṣayrī report.

¹⁵² The naming of the child Imam by name suggests that this report as undergone later redaction, or that the forbidding of naming of the Imam was not universal in the early period.

Disunity amongst Ja‘far’s supporters was not just a question of doctrinal legitimacy; it also had financial implications. Ja‘far’s intolerance of doctrinal variety contributed to the further splintering of his support base and important financial contributions were rerouted to the new splinter groups. Khaṣībī mentions that Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Thawāba and Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Jamāl were taking “the money of the villagers”, suggesting that they had a network of supporters in the country outside Kufa – also territory that was fruitful in producing supporters of the Nuṣayrīs.¹⁵³ These accusations of embezzlement are clearly meant to undermine the claim of Ja‘far, by demonstrating that even his supporters are in bad faith, and had base financial motivations. However, these suggestions of financial problems also corroborate the stories we have already seen in which Ja‘far is depicted as being destitute when he is unable to gain the inheritance of al-Ḥasan.¹⁵⁴ The continued suggestions that Ja‘far was poor are particularly important considering this need to maintain patchwork coalitions. His lack of capital was evidence of the failure of his mission to some. In one report, Ja‘far’s is depicted as being so poor that he is thrown completely on the charity of the syndic (*naqīb*) of the Talibids and the Hashimites:

فقال: له عشرون ولدا وأربع عشرة بنتا وعليه من العيال ستين نفسا من الجوار والخدم والبنين والبنات وغيرهم ،
وهو اليوم يأكل بالربا وقد رهن ثيابه وقدم ابن بشار وحمل عطايا الهاشميين والطالبي

[Abū Sulaymān] said: [Ja‘far] has twenty sons and fourteen daughters and with regards to dependents upon him he has sixty persons from amongst the neighbors and the servants and sons and daughters and others. And these days he eats on debt, and he has pawned

¹⁵³ For references to the Iraqi, and in particular, the Kufan and Basran milieu of some of the early Nuṣayrīs, see Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 9, 17, 20; Friedman, “Ebn Nuṣayr,” *Elr*; Heinz Halm, “Ḡolāt,” *Elr*.

¹⁵⁴ See Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 288-9, and above.

his clothes and Ibn Bashshār came and carried the alms of the Hāshimites and the Tālibids [to him].¹⁵⁵

In the same report, Ja‘far is ashamed before Ibn Bashshār, saying, “By God! If I became a *bāb* in truth, the faces of my daughters would not be uncovered before him.”¹⁵⁶ Though this is clearly the result of anti-Ja‘far propaganda, it suggests that his poverty prevented him from the kind of display of pomp, modesty, and piety that was necessary to mount a convincing campaign for the Imamate or *bāb*-hood. The ideal conception of the Imam was of one whose divine favor was patently manifest, radiating from his countenance and his bearing.¹⁵⁷ Reports of the appearance of the Imams – particularly the Twelfth Imam – often emphasized the glowing richness of his clothes and accoutrements,¹⁵⁸ and a staff of suitably attired servants and chamberlains often appear in the important function of intermediaries for the Imam.¹⁵⁹ While the lavish appearance of the Imam can perhaps be put down to the literary typology of the Imam, or to the creativity of ecstatic visions, it nonetheless highlights the fact that in order to make a viable bid for the Imamate, sufficient capital was necessary to present the appropriate appearance to the world. Perhaps more important than the need to keep up appearances, the reports about disaffected followers embezzling money collected in Ja‘far’s name suggest Ja‘far’s practical inability to maintain a sacral-financial network which would have allowed him to strengthen his following through the patronage of key followers and the provision of prestigious gifts and objects to his followers – an important means both of distributing wealth, but also crucially, of distributing Imamic blessings.

¹⁵⁵ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 297.

¹⁵⁶ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 297.

¹⁵⁷ See Rubin, “Prophets and Progenitors,” 43.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 1: 332; *Hidāya*, 268-9.

¹⁵⁹ See for example, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 476-9

Ja‘far, then, appears to have been unable to maintain the support of his various splintered constituencies. Any claimant of leadership of the fissiparous Imami community needed to maintain shifting alliances of various geographical and ideological groupings, keeping one group without losing the other, and maintaining the flow of canonical taxes. This was one of the reasons which demanded the exercise of Imamic *taqiyya* – not so much due to the oppression of the authorities as the demands of very different religious convictions of the followers, who had developed theologies through exoteric uprisings and political action as well as in esoteric discussion circles over a couple of centuries across the lands of Islam.¹⁶⁰ It is notable that, in contrast to Ja‘far’s clear denunciation of those who claimed that his legitimacy rested on *waṣiyya* from Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad, the proponents of the new Twelver synthesis managed to maintain within their following a considerable diversity of Imami believers, including the Nuṣayrīs, who ultimately adopted the belief both in the Child Imam, son of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the sequence of Twelve Imams, and even the four Envoys, while maintaining their own distinctive cosmology and their own sequence of *bābs* who accompanied the Imams. We will discuss the *wakīls*’ balancing of different constituencies in the following chapter.

The debates with the Ja‘farites continued well into the fourth/tenth century. Khaṣībī’s witness to this is crucial, as he presents a dramatization of the epistemological victory of the twelver Imamis¹⁶¹ over the Ja‘farites. He presents the beliefs and arguments of the Ja‘farites Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Thawāba and Abū ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Jamāl on the basis of a direct meeting in which he debated with them in Baghdad. Khaṣībī’s report of his encounter with

¹⁶⁰ See Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 56 for the early debates around *taqiyya*.

¹⁶¹ At this period, a Nuṣayrī like Khaṣībī can be counted ‘twelver’, in that he acknowledges the Imamate of Twelve Imams up until the Child Imam, son of al-Ḥasan, but not, perhaps, a Twelver in the full sense – an identity that was still, however, in flux.

the Ja‘farites progresses to a moment when the Ja‘farites are converted. At first they appear sincere in their support of Ja‘far, though out-manuevered by Khaṣībī’s arguments.¹⁶² Then Khaṣībī cites clear hadith that clearly indicated that Ja‘far was not the Imam, and the Ja‘farites were unable to respond to him: “They were silent, and I said to them both, “If you have something about your Master (*ṣāhib*) like what you have transmitted about Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī’s Imamate] then cite it!” But they did not have anything, and thus they were refuted.”¹⁶³ Khaṣībī cites further hadith regarding the miraculous nature of al-Ḥasan, and finally the Ja‘farites are persuaded and converted by arguments, proofs and miracles, and they acknowledge that the Child Imam, the son of al-Ḥasan and Narjis is the true Imam.¹⁶⁴ From this account, it appears that the Ja‘farites are defeated due to their lack of hadith-based epistemological power to counter the amassed data of the Twelvers. Khaṣībī’s debate with the Ja‘farites is a kind of dramatization of the conversion to a kind of twelver Imamism that had by then stabilized sufficiently to represent the dominant solution to the crisis of the Imamate. Khaṣībī was born in the latter part of the third/ninth century¹⁶⁵ death date is variously given as 346/957 or 358/969.¹⁶⁶ This would suggest that Khaṣībī’s debates with the Ja‘farites must have taken place some time after the death of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ towards the end of the third/ninth century or in the first half of the fourth/tenth century.¹⁶⁷ Modarressi has carefully tracked the fate of Ja‘far’s followers who turned to his son Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī and his descendants after his death, some of whom appear to have managed to convert their spiritual authority into the leadership of Sufi orders.¹⁶⁸ However,

¹⁶² Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 291-2.

¹⁶³ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 292.

¹⁶⁴ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 293.

¹⁶⁵ Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 17-18.

¹⁶⁶ Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 33.

¹⁶⁷ The *Hidāya* was dedicated to the Ḥamdānid prince, Sayf al-Dawla, who reigned from 333/945 until 356/967. Th. Bianquis, “Sayf al-Dawla,” *EI2*.

¹⁶⁸ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 83-5.

significant levels of allegiance to Ja‘far clearly declined rapidly from the mid-fourth/tenth century onwards. Though Khaṣībī appears to have seen the Ja‘farites as significant enough problem to include his debates with them in the *Hidāya*, by 373/983-984, Mufid states that he did not know anyone who believed in Ja‘far as the Imam.¹⁶⁹

From Khaṣībī’s biased testimony regarding the pro-Ja‘far movement, then, two large areas of problematic emerge that seem to have contributed to Ja‘far’s downfall. The first is that Ja‘far’s lack of capital, and inability to structure an efficient financial network appears to have undermined his ability to project the visible symbolism of a legitimate Imam, or to create a sacral economy centered upon himself that would reassure his followers that they were participating in a divinely-sanctioned community. Secondly, after his death, the epistemological approach of the Twelvers, centered on the compilation of large bodies of hadith reports, such as Kulaynī’s vast *Kāfī*, and works like the *Hidāya* of Khaṣībī himself, was not matched by similar mechanisms among Ja‘farite scholars – perhaps because they were increasingly in the minority, and perhaps also because the communities who ultimately backed Ja‘far were not invested in the large-scale collection of hadith reports. By contrast, a central element of the early Twelver community was the alliance with the Imamis of Qumm, whose epistemological universe had already long been underpinned by a growing corpus of hadith reports preserved by Qummi scholars.

4.6.2. Ja‘far, the test of knowledge, and the Qummi alliance

Ja‘far’s moniker, ‘the Liar’ (*kadhhdhāb*) demonstrates that he, too, was defeated partly in the realm of the epistemological. His claim to the Imamate was rejected partly due to his inability to show that he was an Imam who therefore embodied the divine truth. A number of narratives depict Ja‘far as unable to pass an examination of his knowledge set for him by Qummi

¹⁶⁹ See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 84.

scholars. One of the key topoi in the literature regarding the rejection of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ shows him being questioned, and found wanting, by believers who arrived in Samarra following the death of his brother. Most of these reports depict Ja‘far demanding that a delegation of regional *wakīls* should hand over to him the funds destined for the Imam, but he is stymied when they demand specific proofs, without which they refuse to hand over canonical taxes of their community. These reports are a subset of the topoi of believers travelling in search of the Imam. In one report transmitted in Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya*, it is a follower of Ja‘far who is nonetheless unsatisfied and continues to seek information about the Imam, when he hears stories about the Twelfth Imam:

وكان هواري في جعفر وكنت اسمع بالامام المهدي مقيم بالعسكر وان قوما شاهدوه ويخرج إليهم امره ونهيه وكتبت إلى جعفر أسأله عن الامام والوصي من بعد

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Madā’inī said... my whimsy (*hawāya*) had been fixed on Ja‘far when I heard about *al-Imām al-Mahdī* living at Samarra (*al-‘Askar*) and that a group of people had seen him, and his commanding and forbidding were issued to them. So I wrote to Ja‘far asking him about the Imam and the *waṣī* after him.¹⁷⁰

The report continues with the intervention of a key figure within this literature: the Qummī regional-*wakīl* Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Qummī:

قال العباس بن حيوان وأبو علي الصايغ ان جعفرا كتب إلى أحمد بن إسحاق القمي يطلب منه ما كان يحمله من قم إلى أبي محمد (عليه السلام) وأكثر من ذلك واجتمع أهل قم وأحمد بن إسحاق وكتبوا له كتابا لكتابه وضمنوه مسائل يسألونه عنها وقالوا تجيبنا عن هذه المسائل كما سألوا عنها سلفنا إلى آبائك (عليهم السلام) فأجابوا عنها بأجوبة وهي عندنا نقتدي بها ونعمل عليها فأجبنا عنها مثل ما أجاب أبائك المتقدمون (عليه السلام) حتى نحمل

¹⁷⁰ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 289-90.

إليك حقوق التي كنا نحملها إليهم فخرج الرجل حتى قدم العسكر فأوصل إليه كتاب وأقام عليه مدة يسال عن جواب المسائل فلم يجب عنها ولا عن الكتاب بشئ منه ابدا

‘Abbās b. Ḥaywān and Abū ‘Alī al-Ṣā’igh said that Ja‘far wrote to Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Qummī demanding from him [the canonical taxes] that he had been carrying from Qumm to Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī], and more than that. And the people of Qumm gathered with Aḥmad b. Ishāq and they wrote him a letter of response to [Ja‘far’s] letter including in it questions which they asked him and they said, "Answer these [legal] questions (*masā’il*), just as our forefathers asked your forefathers, they answering them with answers which we have kept, and which we take as a source of emulation, which we act in accordance with. So answer them as your earlier forefathers answered them, so that we may carry to you the rights [canonical taxes] which we used to carry to them! And the man (Aḥmad b. Ishāq) went out until he got to Samarra (al-‘Askar) and delivered to [Ja‘far] the letter and he stayed there regarding that matter for a while, asking about the answer to the [legal] questions, but Ja‘far did not answer them, nor the letter at all, ever.¹⁷¹

This report signals the fact that the choosing of an Imam had begun to be institutionalized through the creation of set questions that Imams were expected to be able to answer, and for which, presumably, there were severe limits placed on the possibility for innovative personal interpretation. It is of great interest, for it places in a rational, legalistic light the more miraculous stories recounted in Ibn Bābūya’s Twelver recension, in which Ja‘far is expected to manifest miraculous knowledge about the nature and amounts of the canonical taxes brought from

¹⁷¹ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 289-90

Qumm.¹⁷² Instead, in this report, Ja‘far is stymied not by any miraculous *deus ex machina*, but by simple questions of (presumably) legal knowledge. Ja‘far – the last living, visible candidate for the Imami Imamate – was tested against the preserved wisdom of the Imams of the past. However, as a mere living repository of knowledge, presumably graced with rather less scholarly ability than the committee of Qummīs he was quizzed by, he was no match for the preserved wisdom of several generations of Imams. This was not the first time in the succession of Imams that the question of knowledge had dogged a candidate. Al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī himself had been accused of being insufficiently knowledgeable to succeed to the Imamate,¹⁷³ but the consensus in favor of him was sufficient to quash this objection. The question of knowledge is one important reason why the Imamate of the visible Imams did not go further than Ja‘far’s failure – the criteria for establishing the Imami Imamate had begun to so stringent that they were increasingly difficult to meet, given the shortcomings of hereditary succession and the increasingly systematized body of knowledge held by the scholars as a touchstone of religious legitimacy.

The presence of Aḥmad b. Ishāq, a Qummī, and member of the elite Ash‘arī clan whose power was pre-eminent in Qumm,¹⁷⁴ is crucial, for it signals the elements of an alliance that formed the central axis around which the new Twelver synthesis was to form: the political power of Baghdadi *wakīls* and the epistemological authority of Qummī traditionists. In the Twelver tradition present in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Qummī’s role in examining and rejecting Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ is played by another Qummī, perhaps a member of the same delegation, Abū al-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī. This account is augmented by the explicit suggestion that the *wakīls* will serve as intermediaries for the Twelfth Imam in the

¹⁷² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475-6; 476-9.

¹⁷³ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 66, n54.

¹⁷⁴ See Newman, *Formative Period*, especially 40-59; 114-15.

coming era; thus signaling the alliance of interests forged at some point between the Qummis with their ethos of interest in the preservation of and the *wakīls* and their offer of a network of authority.¹⁷⁵ We will discuss this narration further in the following chapter, in the context of the emergence of a successful alternative to the Imamate of Ja‘far: the leadership of the high-*wakīls* of al-Ḥasan’s sacral-financial network, from whose ranks, a single pre-eminent *wakīl* eventually emerged who to claim the role of unique intermediary to the hidden Imam, a role that came to be canonized in the traditional Twelver narrative as the office of ‘Envoy.’

¹⁷⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 476-9.

Chapter 5: The *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya* during the Era of Perplexity¹

5.1 Overview

In this chapter we will look at the earliest phase in the authority of the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya* which began to develop during the crisis within the family and household of the Imams discussed in the previous chapter. The structural dynamics of the institutions surrounding the Imamate presented in Chapter 2 – the *wikāla* network in particular – provided the frameworks from which the Occultation era institutions and doctrines were developed. Thus, the crisis-management of the earliest *wakīls* provided models for action and explanation which would be employed a generation later by Abū Ja‘far and developed into the role that would be canonized as ‘Envoy.’ The earliest clique of *wakīls* who fought to maintain unity in the Occultation-era community, however, were not canonized, unlike the ‘First Envoy,’ ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, who, however, is not depicted in any narrative source playing a substantial role in the early Occultation era.² The activities of shadowy figures like Ḥājiz and his ‘successor’ al-Asadī, and Aḥmad b. Ishāq are preserved in the Occultation narratives, but they were not inducted into the hall of fame of the Four Envoy theory. Nonetheless, it is these figures who appear as the earliest actors in propagating the Occultation idea, and establishing the Occultation faction upon a Qummī-Baghdadi alliance as the core from which the Twelver community would develop.

¹ The early Occultation period has been referred to as the era of perplexity (*ḥayra*), both by primary sources and in secondary literature. See Andrew Newman, “Between Qumm and the West: The Occultation According to al-Kulayni and al-Katib al-Nu‘mani,” in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in honour of Wilferd Madelung*, edited by Farhad Daftary and Josef W. Meri (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 102; Halm, *Shi‘ism*, 34. While the emotional perception of perplexity persisted at least until the time of Nu‘mānī, we may say that the height of this perplexity was the period before the rise of Abū Ja‘far and Ibn Rawḥ and the establishment of the office of Envoy, the height of the fissiparous tendencies created of the crisis, in spite of the attempts of the *wakīls* of the Eleventh Imam to reestablish some unity.

² See Chapter 6.

The earliest explicit discussion of the authority of the *wakīls* comes in Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī's *Tanbīh*. As Abū Sahl presents it, the old guard of followers of the Eleventh Imam continued to represent the Imamate for the first twenty years after his death, after which communication with the Hidden Imam was cut off, except for a man who appears to be something like a hidden *wakīl*.³ As I will argue, all of this took place before the establishment of the authority of Abū Ja'far, who we may identify as the first real 'Envoy', though his creation of the office of Envoy had clear precedents, notably in the figure of Ḥājiz. Nonetheless, a clear distinction must be made between Abū Ja'far's preeminent Envoyship which represented a new kind of claim to mediation with to the Hidden Imam, taking place within the context of a new profusion of claims among a renewed class of charismatic *bābs*, and the oligarchic cooperation of the old guard whose authority was more predicated upon their continuity of their roles established during the lifetime of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams, rather than the creation of a new kind of authority to suit the Occultation era.

As we have seen, rather than showing an immediate transfer of authority to 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd, 'the first Envoy', as the tradition would have it, the early years after the death of the Eleventh Imam were marked by a plurality of actors claiming religious authority, including Ja'far 'the Liar', the brother of the Eleventh Imam and Ḥudayth, the mother of the Eleventh Imam. We will now turn to the evidence for the earliest stages of organization of the Occultation-era *wakīlate* which would later generate the office of Envoy. Even if we restrict our investigations to the *wakīls* who are counted as members of the Occultation faction in our sources, a number of figures emerge with contradictory claims to authority in the community. While perplexity reigned across the Shi'ī community in this early phase, the fiscal agents

³ See discussion of Abū Sahl's *Tanbīh*, below, in this Chapter.

(*wakīls*) of the Eleventh Imam were active right after his death, though they were internally split and they did not manage to establish the office of Envoy until some years later, when Abū Ja‘far claimed preeminent authority as the Hidden Imam’s spokesman. In the earliest phase of the Occultation-era *wakīlate*, a number of different forces converged to work against the centripetal forces that threatened to rip the community apart. These different forces established slightly different logics that had to be incorporated into the doctrinal and institutional framework of the Occultation era going forward.

There are two sets of major players depicted in our sources as seeking to establish continuity: the *wakīls*; and the predominantly Qummī scholars who initially propagated the cause of the Occultation faction through the circulation of reports indicating the existence of the Hidden Child Imam. There are points of overlap between these two communities. In particular the figure of Aḥmad b. Ishāq who was both a Qummī scholar who transmitted reports and authored books, as well as having been a *wakīl* involved in the collection and delivery of canonical taxes to the Imams. Our sources also mention other *wakīls*, based both in Baghdad and in Samarra, who appear to have been influential in the perpetuation of the institutions of the Imamate in the context of the obscure institution of the Occultation-era ‘*nāḥiya*’. While much of our information comes from miracle-filled hagiographical accounts of this early era that indicate a high degree of later doctrinal elaboration based on the early rumors, reports and eyewitness accounts, we can, nonetheless, reconstruct the broad lines of the development of an alliance between the Qummī scholars and the Baghdad and Samarra *wakīls* which was to form the central axis around which the new Twelver synthesis was to develop.

5.2 Forerunners of the Envoy before the Occultation era

Even before the death of the Eleventh Imam, there had been structures in place which foreshadowed the creation of the office of Envoy. Since the beginning of the Imami Imamate, there had always been an elite clique surrounding the Imam. Indeed, given that Imam means ‘leader’, what is an Imam without followers? Some of these followers of the Imams are identified in the sources as fiscal agents (*wakīls*), but many are not. These men became particularly important during the earlier ‘*ghayba*’ of Imams al-Kāzīm and al-Hādī whose respective imprisonment and house arrest cut them off from large-scale communication with their followers.⁴ As has been noted by several scholars, the accession of the Ninth Imam, al-Jawād when he was still a child was probably engineered by such a clique of elite Imamis, and ensured that this clique should be responsible for guiding the community during his minority.⁵ On the death of the Ninth Imam, too, we are told that twelve selected followers of the Imam received written notes regarding the succession of the Imam’s son. These ‘leaders of the party’ (*ru’asā’ al-‘aṣāba*) then met to deliberate about the succession after he died.⁶ All of this suggests that the core elite could act as kingmakers who had a large stake in defining the succession of Imams. However, the core elite, no less that the community at large appears to have been painfully divided by the crisis of succession following the death of the Eleventh Imam, al-‘Askarī.

5.3 Hadith, theology and institutions

There are three elements which converged to create the Twelver synthesis. The first two of these elements were epistemological, and the third was pragmatic. Firstly the rumors of the

⁴ Buyukkara, “Schism” on al-Kāzīm’s imprisonment, and al-Hādī’s house arrest as ‘*ghayba*’, and Khaṣībī on Hādī’s inaccessibility as ‘*ghayba*’, *Hidāya*, 267.

⁵ Arjomand, “Crisis,” 497.

⁶ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:324.

existence of a posthumous pregnancy or the earlier birth of a Child Imam began to gain currency and eventually lead to a firm belief in the existence of the Child Imam, which gradually congealed into doctrine through the hadith-collecting labors of the Qummī traditionists. As we saw in the previous chapter, a crucial figure in the propagation of these ideas seems to have been ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī, whose book lists in the *rijāl* literature indicates his interest in the Occultation, and his alliance with Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, and who visited Kufa some time after 290/902, and widely propagated many of his hadith reports. The second parallel development was that these hadith reports were supported by theological deductions of the necessary existence of an Imam. Thirdly the *wakīls* who had worked for the Eleventh Imam attempted to maintain continuity by continuing to fulfil their functions, even without secure knowledge of who the Imam was after 260/874. These elements are complicated by the fact that they were not independent, and there was some important overlap between the *wakīls* and the scholars, especially in the Qummī context in which the ideas of Occultation and Safirate most fruitfully incubated. Indeed it must have been so in order to develop a core of consensus around which both institutional and epistemological problems could be solved. The key figure who represents an intersection between the epistemological concerns of the Qummī hadith transmitters and the institutional concerns of the *wakīls* was Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Qummī, who was a scholar, and a transmitter and recorder of hadith, and also some kind of *wakīl* or delegate responsible for bringing money from Qumm to the Imam in Samarra. In this chapter, we will concentrate on the intersection, or alliance between the Qummī hadith scholars and the *wakīls* based in Baghdad and Samarra. Before we commence with this, however, we will briefly look again at the probable theological developments during the earliest phase.

5.4 Theological developments relating to the early *nāḥiya*

The heresiographers report that after the death of the Eleventh Imam, the Imami community split into 13 or more factions, only one of which constituted the Twelver believers in the Child Imam born to the Eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī during his lifetime. Though the heresiographers are primarily interested in category, rather than chronology, we can nonetheless piece together a probable chronology of theological developments by establishing logical categories for likely developments, cross-checking these against the narrative sources, and also against the chronologies suggested by publications of works in later periods which do, nonetheless suggest something of the extent of the antiquity and longevity of certain ideas. The ideas contained in the heresiographies of Nawbakhtī and Qummī, and early works of doctrine and theology such as the extracts from Abu Sahl al-Nawbakhtī’s *al-Tanbīh fī al-imāma*⁷ and Ibn Qiba’s works transmitted by Ibn Bābūya⁸ provide us with a doctrinal framework which shows us some of the theoretical attempts that were made to fit earlier doctrinal formulations with the *de facto* events on the ground. These do not always correspond clearly with the narrative reports which are preserved in later hadith compilations. With careful analysis, however some clear correspondences can be drawn, as we shall see below. However, in addition to these doctrinal efforts made by these scholars, there was also an extent to which doctrine was guided by the practical crisis management of the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya* as they attempted to hold the community together.

In the early days after the death of al-‘Askarī, as the problems with the potential Imamate of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ emerged, and the maneuverings surrounding al-‘Askarī’s inheritance and the phantom pregnancy of his concubine complicated any hope for a clear succession, a constellation

⁷ Modarressi mentions that this book was written around 290/903, *Crisis*, 88.

⁸ See Modarressi, *Crisis*.

of doctrinal speculations was generated, some of which might have been associated with a particular party or group within the Shi‘i community, and others which would have cut across party lines. For example, the idea of the succession of the brother was particularly acceptable to those who were already upheld the possibility of succession between brothers due to their membership of the Faṭḥite faction.

As for the *wakīls*, in the earliest days, they do not appear to have been united or confident enough to attempt to advance a specific doctrinal solution to the crisis in succession. The early reports regarding the activities of the early Samarra *nāḥiya* often shy away from explicit naming of the explicit mechanism through which they claimed authority. Very likely, this is because there was no unified vision of doctrine in the earliest phase after the death of al-‘Askarī. Inevitably the *wakīls* would have shared a desire to hold the institutions of the Imamate together until such time as the succession could be resolved. There were certainly *wakīls* who seemed to have been united by the common cause of community coherence, while perhaps divided in their beliefs as to the exact identity of the incumbent Imam.

The first doctrinal challenge for *wakīls* was to decide whether or not to accept the Imamate of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’. As we have seen, Ja‘far was served by *wakīls* who attempted to collect money in his name, some of whom abandoned Ja‘far and embezzled the money. It is likely that those who were *wakīls* for al-‘Askarī may have flinched from entering the service of his estranged brother. Some may have upheld the claims of Ḥudayth to inherit both property and the spiritual leadership of the community. Some may have vacillated between positions. The phantom pregnancy may have given hope to the opponents of Ja‘far, and indeed may have been manipulated by them. While there may have been an operational consensus among *wakīls* aiming at continuity, some regional *wakīls* were undoubtedly drawn towards the decentralization which

would give themselves greater autonomy as local representatives of Imamate. Those *wakīls* who assumed the operational continuity of the *wakīlate* had to win over members of the community at a time when there was very little certainty about anything. Many perhaps attempted to maintain continuity while sitting on the fence to wait and see how things panned out. This non-committed position, more of an absence of doctrine than a doctrine, was nonetheless reified into a ‘faction’ (*firqā*) by the heresiographers. The “I-don’t-know-ites” or *lā-adriyya* is depicted by Nawbakhtī as distinct theological doctrine:

وقالت الفرقة الحادية العشر منهم لما سئلوا عن ذلك وقيل لهم ما تقولون في الإمام أهو جعفر أم غيره؟ قالوا لا ندري ما نقول في ذلك أهو من ولد الحسن أم من إخوته فقد اشتبه علينا الأمر. إنا نقول إن الحسن بن علي كان أماماً وقد توفي وإن الأرض لا تخلو من حجة ومنتوقف ولا نقدم على شيء حتى يصح لنا الأمر ويتبين

The eleventh faction of [the Imamis after the death of al-‘Askarī], when they were asked about that, and it was said to them, “What do you say about the Imam? – Is he Ja‘far [‘the Liar’], or someone else?” they responded, “We do not know. We do not make any claims about that, whether [the Imam] is from the offspring of al-Ḥasan or from his brethren, for the matter has become doubtful for us (*ishtabaha ‘alaynā al-amr*). We only say that al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī was an Imam, and he died, and that the world is never empty of a Proof (*hujja*), and we hesitate and we will venture upon a particular course (*lā nudism ‘alā shay’*) until the matter has been proven to us and made manifest.”⁹

Beyond its theological implications, the stance of “I-don’t-know-ism” was an intensely practical solution to a perplexing time, though also deeply unsatisfying; too weak a position to have survived long as an independent doctrinal position. However agnostic this position was, it did,

⁹ Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 89-90.

however articulate the major premise of Imami Shi‘ism: the world is never without an Imam, this was the basic shared principle that was necessary for the formation of consensus.

The challenge for the *wakīls* of the early *nāḥiya* was to establish consensus upon the minimal doctrinal foundations necessary to allow for continuity. “I-don’t-know-ism” was not sufficiently positive a doctrine to survive, and must have been soon succeeded by stronger positions, and indeed we can see a variety of these solutions in the heresiographies which can suggest possible paths towards the construction of a consensus around the idea of a Hidden Imam.

From “I don’t know-ism”, to “It-must-be-so-ism” (*La-adriyya* to *lā-buddiyya*)

While the *lā adriyya* doctrine, “I-don’t-know-ism,” suggests an early, minimalistic solution to the problem of Imami identity, the *lā-buddiyya* doctrine, or “It-must-be-so-ism,” presents a more decisive, theologized solution than “I-don’t-know-ism”. The *lā-buddiyya* doctrine was attacked by polemicists opposed to the nascent Twelver party,¹⁰ (who preferred, however, to call themselves the *qaṭ‘iyya*: the party of certainty, referring to the certainty that al-‘Askarī had died). The doctrine of “It-must-be-so-ism,” proceeded from accepted Imami doctrine that there *must always be an Imam upon the earth* an idea enshrined in many hadith.¹¹ On the basis of the “It-must-be-so-ite” idea, a minimum doctrinal limit was set for the field of discussion within which the new Twelver synthesis could be formed. It was not a case of ‘anything goes’. The “It-must-be-so-ite” idea could not tolerate the possibility of a break in the sequence of Imams, or *fatra* which the Imamis opposed as a point of contrast with Zaydis¹² and Sunnis¹³

¹⁰ See for example, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 54-5.

¹¹ See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 139, and the hadith quoted below.

¹² Ella Landau-Tasserou, “Zaydī Imams as Restorers of Religion: *Iḥyā’* and *Tajdīd* in Zaydī Literature.” *JNES*, 49, No. 3 (Jul., 1990): 252-4.

¹³ Ch. Pellat, “Fatra,” *EI2*.

which would have radically changed the nature of belief, and lead to the destructuring/denaturing of the Imami community.

Because al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī had quarreled with his brother Ja‘far, many of those *wakīls* and community members who had served and had been supporters of al-Ḥasan were lead to reject Ja‘far. The implication of the *lā-buddiyya* idea, as defended by Ibn Qiba, was that it excluded the possibility of the Imamate of Ja‘far, but instead of suggesting a living, visible alternative, it had recourse to theological reasoning: a doctrine replaced a physical candidate for Imamate.¹⁴ On the basis of the idea that there had to be an Imam somewhere, the Imami elite opposed to Ja‘far could proceed upon the basis of a certain consensus. In response to anxious doubt as to whether the world could continue without a manifest Imam, there was an old hadith attributed to Imam ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn:

قال (عليه السلام) : ولم تخل الأرض منذ خلق الله آدم من حجة الله فيها ، ظاهر مشهور ، أو غائب مستور ، ولا تخلو إلى أن تقوم الساعة من حجة الله فيها ، ولولا ذلك لم يعبد الله . قال سليمان : فقلت للصادق (عليه السلام) : فكيف ينتفع الناس بالحجة الغائب المستور ؟ قال : كما ينتفعون بالشمس إذا سترها السحاب .

[Zayn al-‘Ābidīn] said: “The earth has not been empty of a Proof for God [i.e. a prophet or imam] since God created Adam (AS); whether manifest and well-known or concealed and hidden (*ghā’ib mastūr*). And it will not be empty of a Proof of God until the Hour occurs. And if it were not for that, God would not be worshipped.”

¹⁴ In one tract by Ibn Qiba extant in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, a pro-Ja‘far disputant derisively used the term *lā-buddiyya* to argue that it was absurd that the Twelvers rejected a visible, present candidate, Ja‘far, in favor of a doctrine based on theological reasoning, but without supporting any physical representative. The Twelver theologian, Ibn Qiba, defended the Twelver position, noting that his attackers, the party of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, also adhered to an “It-must-be-so-ite” principle that there must be an Imam upon earth. Modarressi, *Crisis*, 157-162.

Sulaymān said: And I said to al-Šādiq [who related the hadith] (AS): “How do people benefit from the concealed, hidden Proof?”¹⁵

He replied: “Just as they benefit from the sun when the clouds cover it.”

The idea of the Imam’s effect being like the cloud-covered sun appears in the rescripts of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, and perhaps had been employed earlier by the *wāqifa* on behalf of their Hidden Imam Mūsā al-Kāzim.¹⁶

5.4.1 Who and where is the Imam?

Once it was accepted that there must be an Imam, somewhere, the question of who the Imam was and where he might be was critical. While the idea of an absent, hidden Imam might have been convenient to some who rejected Ja‘far but wanted to preserve the continuity of the institutions that had been focused upon al-‘Askarī, the urge for a living, visible and active Imam led many to search for alternative Imams. Upon the death of al-‘Askarī 260/874, the Ismaili *da‘wa* had very likely already begun to attract a following in Kufa and, very possibly in Khūzistān and Syria also,¹⁷ and so in the absence of visible offspring of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the danger posed by the Ismaili candidate for Imamate was very real. While the option of an Ismaili Imam may have been attractive to many Shi‘a who had had no direct contact with the Imam in Samarra, for the servants and *wakīls* of al-‘Askarī, this would represent a total shift in the makeup of the community, and a destruction of the particular network in which they participated, and through which they justified their existence. This danger is the background to the effort to establish the identity of the incumbent Imam as a means of reestablishing meaning in the new era

¹⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 207.

¹⁶ It is also notable that what precedes this part of the hadith is redolent of the idea of God’s delegation (*tafwīd*) to the Imams of some of his actions. See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 19-51.

¹⁷ The date 264/877-8 is mentioned in a late report for the conversion to the Ismaili cause of the Kufan *dā‘ī*, Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ. See Wilferd Madelung, “Ismā‘īliyya,” *EI2*; “Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ,” *EI2*; and “Carmatians,” *EIr*.

without going beyond the logic and structures cultivated by successive generations of earlier Imams. As we have seen, this search gave rise to some abortive attempts at justifying the existence of an Imam through the claims of the posthumous pregnancy of the concubine, the mediation of the mother of al-‘Askarī for the Child Imam, and the claims that a servant like Badr the Eunuch or ‘Aqīd the Eunuch was the spokesperson for the Imam. It is impossible to tell which of these stories are the literary after-echoes of real political movements, and which are merely the stories generated by the rumor-mill in the era of perplexity. While the narrative of a Child Imam began to be accepted by a core of the Eleventh Imam’s followers, it is telling that even among the partisans of the Child Imam there was dissent about which narrative of the Imam’s birth to accept,¹⁸ and that these were regarded as separate sects by the heresiographers. This suggests a level of fragility to sect formation brought about by the great perplexity of the time. Even those who rejected Ja‘far and agreed upon the existence of a Child of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī appear to have been at loggerheads, though we do see Nawbakhtī using the phrase “the Partisans of the Child” (*aṣḥāb al-walad*) to apparently describe the circle of believers who had accepted the existence of a son of al-‘Askarī who was the Imam.¹⁹

One solution that appears to have been applied to these different perspectives among the Partisans of the Child Imam was the declaration of an intolerance towards the discussion of certain details, allowing for consensus to develop around the sure existence of the Imam (*lā-buddiyya*), while suppressing internal differences which might be divisive, such as the name of the Imam and other details. Our early reports include a number of suggestions that such an

¹⁸ Against the canonical Twelver view that the Child Imam was born before ‘Askarī’s death Nawbakhtī mentions a group which argued that the Child was born eight months after his death, and another than upheld an ongoing posthumous pregnancy. *Firaq*, 85-6.

¹⁹ The “Partisans of the Child” (*aṣḥāb al-walad*) are mentioned as those in opposition to the proponents of an ongoing pregnancy which will eventually result in the birth of the Qā’im. Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, 86.

intolerance of naming the Imam was observed, thereby cementing the unity upon the question of the existence of an Imam who was the son of al-‘Askarī rather than his brother.

On the basis of the indications of the heresiographies, and the early narrative reports, while we cannot reconstruct the exact dispositions of the earliest political-doctrinal factions, we can understand the basic outlines of the playing-field as it must have been. The diagram below situates the positioning of the basic core of Twelver beliefs within the broader playing field of Imami and Shi‘i ideas during the era of perplexity.

Figure 3: The doctrinal milieu of the early Occultation-faction²⁰



BEYOND THE PALE OF THE OCCULTATION FACTION:

- **Those who accepted Imamate of Ja'far 'the Liar' (many faḥītes)**
- **Ismailis: Imam from line of Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl**
- **Those who accepted possibility of intermission between Imams (*fatra*)**
- **Those who accepted non-Faḥimid lineage of Imams (*Zaydīs*)**
- **Those who believed that there is no longer an Imam**

²⁰ Note that this diagram is generated largely through heresiographical categories, but it does suggest the major ideal doctrinal limitations placed upon group membership, at least from the distinctive Twelver point of view. No doubt the actual political formations at the time were not clearly based on doctrinal positions, but, as we have seen in the case of the Faḥīte and *ghulāt* follower of Ja'far, there may have been many unpredictable combinations of strange doctrinal bedfellows along the way.

5.5 Abū Sahl's *Kitāb al-tanbīh*: the decisive touchstone for dating the early *nāḥiya*

The earliest extant text to give explicit indications of the early development of the institution of Envoy is Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī's²¹ *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, written around 290/903.²² Klemm claims that in this text, "there is no mention at all of a continuously functioning *sifāra*."²³ This claim, however, is not entirely accurate. There are, indeed, assertions about the continuous nature of the Imam's representation down to the time of the composition of the text, but they are tantalizingly allusive and provide ambiguous information about the identity of the actors involved. They also do contain two kinds of rupture: between the old guard and a newer generation of *wakīls*, and between an era in which the Imam's statements were issued, and an era in which there had been no such communications. No names are mentioned, and there are a number of difficulties in interpretation of the allusive remarks Abū Sahl makes in the course of his arguments. Nonetheless, while the reports transmitted by 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far al-Ḥimyarī may well date back to before this time, the *Tanbīh* is the earliest conclusively datable mention of the Hidden Imam's intermediaries. Due to the fragmentary nature of the references to the Envoys/*wakīls*, I will not quote at length from the work as it is in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*,²⁴ but rather I present the chronology of the early Occultation period, as far it can be reconstructed from Abū Sahl's piecemeal remarks:

- **260/874:** The Eleventh Imam died. All of trusted men (*thiqāt*) amongst of Eleventh Imam's retainers (*rijāl*) attested to the Imamate of the son. These men came to a unanimous consensus that al-Ḥasan had left behind as successor a child who is the Imam,

²¹ See Madelung, "Abū Sahl Nawbakhtī", *EIr*.

²² Klemm suggests that it was written between 290/903-300/913, however, the later date is unlikely, because the text states that the Imam has been hidden "for 30 years or thereabouts". Modarressi also notes that the text was finished around 290/903, *Crisis*, 88.

²³ Klemm, "*Sufarā*," 147.

²⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 88-94.

and they ordered the people not to ask about his name and to hide that from his enemies.²⁵

- **260-262/874-876:** The caliphal authorities (*sulṭān*) searched for the Imam, appointing watchers over Eleventh Imam's houses and concubines, and the Twelfth Imam disappeared due to the fear inspired by this search.
- **260-280/874-893:** Initially, a group of the Eleventh Imam's trusted associates (*thiqāt*) act as the Imam's representatives, issuing letters and handling money on his behalf.
- **280-290/893-903:** After more than twenty years, most of the trusted associates of the Eleventh Imam had died out. However, one man survived for a while longer to be the unique representative of the old guard, regarding whose trustworthiness and probity there was unanimity. After the death of this one man, correspondence with the Imam was cut off. However, even until the time of writing of *K. al-tanbīh* (290/903), Abū Sahl claims, there was a gateway (*bāb*) or a contact (*sabab*) who was in touch with the Hidden Imam.

The depiction of a group of trusted men from amongst the Eleventh Imam's retainers is consistent the picture presented by the earliest narrative reports, for example those in Kulaynī, in which the old guard of the Eleventh Imam's men, sometimes anonymous, sometimes named, attest to the existence of an Imam, and maintained the institutions of the Imamate. Abū Sahl mentions that this group give witness to the existence of a successor. This suggests that we can identify this group with witnesses like Aḥmad b. Ishāq and 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd, as well as actors such as Ḥājiz who appear in early reports representing the Hidden Imam and issuing letters and rescripts in his name.

²⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 92-3.

Abū Sahl's account of the Occultation-era intermediaries raises grave questions for our understanding of the career of Abū Ja'far al-'Amrī, who is said to have died in 305/917. If he really died at this date, then he could not be accounted one of the members of the old guard of trusted associates who distributed the statements of the Imams. Instead, we would have consider him as a member of the newer generation who came up during the Occultation period, albeit someone connected to the era of the Eleventh Imam through his father's service. In this case, the hadith reports in which the Eleventh Imam explicitly states that 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd *and* Abū Ja'far were both the Eleventh Imam's trusted associates (*thiqa*), must have been redacted to anachronistically include Abū Ja'far amongst his retainers. On the other hand, if we were to reject Abū Ja'far's death date, it would throw the historical chronology of the later Envoys into disarray. Given that the early period is particularly obscure, however, it seems likely that the date of Abū Ja'far's death is more likely to be accurate. We do not, for example, possess the death date of 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd,²⁶ or any of the other early high-*wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*. In general the pattern of literary record in this period, historical facts move from obscurity to more careful preservation, once the theological importance of the *wakīlate* became clear.

The *Tanbīh*, then provides us with a powerful tool in clarifying the chronology of the early Occultation. It indicates that there was a clear rupture between the old guard of trusted associates of the Eleventh Imam, and a newer generation to whom Abū Ja'far belongs. Thus, we can suddenly make sense of the perplexing anonymity and obscurity of the names and activities of the *wakīls* depicted in the earliest layer of narrative reports to be found in Kulaynī's *Kāfi*, Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*, Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, and other sources. This old guard can be identified with

²⁶ Though we do have a report from Ibn Mahziyār which suggests he died before 280/893. Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225. See Chapter 7.

the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*, before the office of Envoy was established by Abū Ja‘far.²⁷ The chronology established through the testimony of Abū Sahl, then, is in clear contradiction of the canonical Twelver narrative of the Four Envoys. While we might be tempted to assume that the one man left alive from amongst the early *nāḥiya* would be ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, this is not supported by the early narrative reports, for he does not appear in any narrative reports as operating as a *wakīl* after the death of the Eleventh Imam.²⁸ ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, was certainly one of the Eleventh Imam’s men, so whatever his role in the Occultation period, he must have died by 280/893. Abū Ja‘far died around 305/917, and so he cannot have been one of the old guard. Nor, it appears, can he have been recognized as Envoy before 290/903, when the *Tanbīh* was written, or if he had, then only among a very small coterie. This means that for around ten years leading up to the composition of the *Tanbīh* in 290/303, direct communications with the Imam had been cut off. Abū Ja‘far must have revived the practice of issuing rescripts in the Imam’s name once he established himself as Envoy.

However, one element of Abū Sahl’s testimony remains particularly intriguing. After the last member of the old guard had died, even though no more rescripts were issued, mediation between the Hidden Imam and his followers did not end completely, but instead, there remained a representative who was himself hidden:

وقد ذكر بعض الشيعة ممن كان في خدمة الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام وأحد ثقاته أن السبب بينه وبين ابن الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام متصل وكان يخرج من كتبه وأمره ونهيه على يده إلى شيعته إلى أن توفي وأوصى إلى رجل من الشيعة مستور فقام مقامه في هذا الامر .

²⁷ While the term *nāḥiya* does persist into the period of the Envoys, Abū Ja‘far and Ibn Rawḥ, it is often used in place of any name, suggesting that it was used in a period of in clarity regarding the identity of those representing Imamic authority. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the term.

²⁸ See Chapter 6.

And a certain one of the Shi‘a (*ba‘d al-shī‘a*) among those who were in the service of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (AS) – one of his trusted associates (*thiqāt*) – mentioned that the connection (*sabab*) between himself and the son of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (AS) was ongoing (*muttaṣil*). And [the Imam] used to issue some of his letters and his commands and his forbiddings by [that man’s] hand to his Shi‘a until [the man] died. Then he made a designation of succession to a hidden man from the Shi‘a and he stood in his place in this matter [i.e. the leadership of the community] (*wa awṣā ilā rajulin min al-shī‘a, mastūr, fa-qāma maqāmahu fī hādihā al-amr*).²⁹

Given that there was a designation of succession (*awṣā, waṣīyya*) of the role of mediation, this appears to be some kind of quasi-Imamic hidden *wakīl* or *bāb*. Abū Sahl even uses the word *bāb* though in collocation with the word *sabab* (connection).³⁰ It is unclear from the text whether this designation was made by the Hidden Imam himself, or from the previous man. At any rate, according to Abū Sahl, the structures of mediation had not died out, as Klemm asserts, but rather, by 290/303, we can say that even though the initial flourishing of the *nāḥiya* as an intermediary structure with the Hidden Imam had died out along with the companions of the Eleventh Imams, there continued to be a belief in a less direct contact with a hidden *bāb* or *wakīl* who was himself thought to be in communication with the Hidden Imam. The anonymity of both the first man amongst the Imam’s trusted associates, and the hidden *wakīl* who was still said to be in contact with the Imam during Abū Sahl’s time suggests that there may have been some dispute or confusion about the identity of the Hidden Imam’s *bāb* and *wakīl*.³¹

²⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 90.

³⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 93.

³¹ It is perhaps not unusual, in the context of theological disputation in which Abū Sahl was writing, that he should have omitted the names of the other *wakīls*, but it does perhaps underline the fragility of the consensus that he was depicting, and certainly the idea of a hidden *wakīl* is enough to suggest a great deal of perplexity regarding the identity of the Imam’s representatives.

From this account, we can see a certain precedent had formed for the establishment of the Envoy-ship, even amongst the early *nāḥiya*, when one man survived the other trusted associates of the Eleventh Imam to become the only to claim contact with the Hidden Imam. This is a prototype Envoy figure, the earliest clearly datable reference to such a figure in our sources. This first Envoy-like figure is said to be one among the various trusted companions (*thiqāt*) of the Eleventh Imam. Notably, it is he who first “ordered the people to secrecy (*kitmān*) and not to broadcast anything of the condition (*amr*) of the Imam,”³² indicating a process of crisis management aimed at clamping down on rampant speculation that would have increasingly emphasized the divisions in the community. While a canonical Twelver framework indicate that this single surviving man was one of the ‘Amrīs, so clearly mentioned as *thiqāt* in the *thiqa* hadith in Kulaynī,³³ it must be emphasized that, for example in Kashshī’s *Rijāl*, the word *thiqa* is often used to describe various trustworthy followers of the Imam,³⁴ and our sources mention various other trustworthy associates of the Eleventh Imam who were instrumental in the early-Occultation era, especially Aḥmad b. Ishāq and Ḥājiz.

The successor to this first man is not only unnamed, but he is said to be hidden (*mastūr*), and is said to be still at large, albeit hidden, at the time of writing in 290/903. It is very possible that, in fact, Abū Sahl did not exactly know the identity of the Envoy whose existence he believed in, though he required his existence as a theological prop for his argumentation regarding the existence of the Twelfth Imam. It is likely that this argumentation here is an inheritance from the earliest phase of argumentation about the Twelfth Imam that claimed that the Imam existed because not only had people seen him, but some men remained in touch with

³² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 93.

³³ See Chapter 6.

³⁴ Including, the later renegade al-Bilālī, of whom more below. Kashshī, 407-10.

him and continued to provide guidance on his behalf. With the Imam's intermediary as an anonymous, largely inaccessible figure, it lays the field open for a gradual elaboration of memory upon the theme of the Envoys from the earliest sources up to the time of Ṭūsī, an elaboration which eventually filled in the vacuum of knowledge about the early intermediaries with the doctrine of the Four Envoys. It is easier to fill a vacuum of information than it is to contest established facts or beliefs.

Abū Sahl's testimony, then, indicates that there was an *interregnum*, or rupture in authority between the early *wakīls* and trusted companions of the Eleventh Imam who continued to issue statements on behalf of an unnamed Imam, and a period in which this authority was less clear, although the belief existed that a hidden man existed who acted as a *bāb* or connection with the Hidden Imam. In chapter 7, we will return to the question of the hidden *wakīl* or *bāb* of the Hidden Imam. In this chapter, we will focus upon the early, pre-rupture *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*. Before the period of interregnum occurred, however, a single man survived from amongst the old guard who continued to represent the *nāḥiya* and issue statements on behalf of the Imams. One of our tasks in this chapter will be to assess the claims of various figures who appear in our sources to be that one man.

5.6 The contribution of the Qummī scholars

Stories about the existence of a Child Imam appeared almost immediately upon the death of the Eleventh Imam. As we have seen, one of the most influential of these was the idea of the pregnant concubine who was to give birth to the Child Imam after his father's death. It seems likely that this rumor launched the idea of the Child Imam, which, once abroad, was not to be

repudiated,³⁵ but rather mutated when placed under the pressure of events. Given the energetic surveillance reputed to have been employed by the ‘Abbasids to falsify the claims regarding the pregnant concubine, alternative narratives of the birth of a Child Imam began to circulate, this time depicting the birth of a Child Imam *before* his father’s death. One such narrative in Kulaynī is said to have been transmitted in 279/892,³⁶ giving us thereby a sense of when these accounts began to circulate more widely. This is, notably, the time when, according to Abū Sahl’s *Tanbīh*, the old guard died out, precipitating a crisis in the mediation of Imamic guidance. This was also about the time when Ja‘far’s claims were being seriously challenged, perhaps around the time of Ja‘far’s death,³⁷ perhaps suggesting that the failure both of Ja‘far’s bid for Imamate, and in the rupture in the mediatory structures of the early *nāḥiya* resulted in the profusion of alternative narratives.

As we will see in Chapter 6, Kulaynī transmitted an eyewitness account attesting to the existence of the Child Imam associated with Aḥmad b. Ishāq the Qummī, and transmitted by ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, another Qummī. The magnification of the role of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī probably occurred as a result of the rise of the real authority of his son, Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, following the rupture. However, in the reports from the earliest era, a number of figures distinct from either of the ‘Amrīs emerge as important elite actors as representing the *nāḥiya*. In contrast, neither of the ‘Amrīs appears to be associated with the earliest phase of

³⁵ The partisans of the pregnancy argued that the reports regarding that this pregnancy were uncontrovertible due to their wide circulation, being, “well-attested and widespread (*qā’im, mashhūr*),” recognized even by the authorities and the generality of people. Qummī, *Maqālāt*, 115.

³⁶ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 514-15. In this report a man from Fārs enters into the service of the Eleventh Imam who shows his son to him before he dies, thus establishing the doctrine of the Child Imam as born prior to al-‘Askarīs death, against claims about a posthumous pregnancy. This report makes no mention of any *wakīl* or Envoy-like figure.

³⁷ See Chapter 4.

activities of the *wakīls*.³⁸ In this earliest phase, the *nāḥiya* can be understood as representing continuity in the establishment of the Eleventh Imam after his death. It is very likely that the Imam's *wakīls* and other followers aimed to maintain institutional continuity, even in the face of the conflict with the family of the Imam. It is likely that this continuity may have been maintained even without the claim for the existence of a Hidden Imam, following which, a transition would have been made towards pledging allegiance to the figure of the Hidden Imam, based upon the attestation to his existence by a core clique of the old guard. It is unclear when this transition from representing the dead Eleventh Imam, to representing the Hidden Child Imam would have been made, and the sources suggest that the edges were blurred even at the time, as secrecy and intolerance of explicit speculation cast a veil over the explicit nature of authority in the community. This secrecy and intolerance of vocal speculation was nothing new for the Shi'a,³⁹ and can be seen in the lengths which 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far al-Ḥimyarī goes to in the reports he transmits to use scriptural justification based on the precedent of the Prophet Abraham to defend the fact that he asks questions about whether 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd had seen the Child Imam.⁴⁰

The ambiguity regarding the nature of authority at the center of the community at this time can be seen from the reports which use euphemisms to refer to the establishment of the Imam. Rather than referring unambiguously to the Imam, or the *wakīl*, or to a named individual, there is a common tendency instead to refer to names like the *nāḥiya*, *al-gharīm*, and so on, which might refer to the Imam himself, or metonymically, to his establishment in general. In this

³⁸ 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd only appears as a *wakīl* during the lifetime of the Eleventh Imam, and only appears in the Occultation era as a figure attesting to the existence of the Hidden Imam, but not as a *wakīl* who collects money and distributes the Imam's statements. See Chapter 6.

³⁹ See, for example Etan Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī-Shī'ī Views on *Taqiyya*," *JAOS* 95, No. 3 (1975): 395-402.

⁴⁰ Chapter 6.

way, the elite followers of the Imam may have been tacitly conflated with the Imam himself, even, perhaps, before any explicit claims were made about the identity of the successor of al-‘Askarī. While there was continuity among the *wakīls*, believers could perhaps be persuaded that there was continuity in the community, in spite of the crisis within the household of the Imam. Many reports mention the Imam sending messages to his followers through anonymous messengers (*rasūl*), servants (*ghulām*) and eunuchs (*khādim*),⁴¹ suggesting that the inner household of the Imam may have been involved in perpetuating this sense of continuity, or that they were, in later times, used as witnesses to reconstruct a sense of continuity when there had been none. The crisis in the family of the Imam, and the messy inheritance dispute between Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ and Ḥudayth, the Imam’s mother, however, necessitated that the Imam’s house at Samarra could not easily be used as a base for operations of the Occultation-era *nāḥiya*.

While the attempt to maintain continuity at the center by the household servants and agents of the Imam was an important element of authority in the new era, it was important that members of the community also acknowledged the continuity in the Imamate. For the charisma of the Imam and the Imamic institutions to continue, they had to be acknowledged by the charismatic community. In our sources, this acknowledgement, the renewing of the charismatic contract between community and Imamate can be seen in the reports of the delegations from Qumm and the Jibāl region of Iran. These delegation hadiths help us see that continuity was not imposed from the center alone, but that there was also an insistence on continuity by Qummī delegates and scholars like Aḥmad b. Ishāq and ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī.

⁴¹ See above, Chapter 3.

5.7 Aḥmad b. Ishāq and the Qummī delegation

The delegation to test the knowledge of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ is an important trope in our sources. As with any of these reports, its historicity is uncertain, but it is clear that this trope became a significant factor in the cultural memory of the Shi‘a in the late Third /Ninth century or the early fourth/tenth century, and if these reports do not reflect an actual event, then they at least can be seen to reflect a Qummī willingness to acknowledge the continuation of a charismatic presence residing within the Iraḡi wakīlate.

A key figure is Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Qummī. He is significant in that he appears in reports in Kulaynī’s *Kāfī* and other sources, attesting both to the existence of the Child Imam, depicting ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as the reliable, trusted servant of the Eleventh Imam and personal eyewitness to the Child Imam.⁴² Aḥmad b. Ishāq also appears as one of the figures associated with this testing of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’’s claim to Imamate. This testing of Ja‘far is depicted as having taken place in several reports as a delegation of people from Qumm was sent to Samarra to identify the true Imam to whom they should pay their canonical taxes. In a narrative from Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya*, Aḥmad b. Ishāq is depicted as one of the representative of the Qummīs who transported money to the Imam in Samarra, and who was instrumental in testing the legal knowledge of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, and thereafter denying him the money of the Qummīs.⁴³ This kind of test of knowledge may have been a crucial step in proving Ja‘far as unsuitable for the Imamate. The test of knowledge is also reported in the case of earlier Imams,⁴⁴ suggesting that it may indeed have been a protocol that was necessary before the formal acceptance of an Imam by the Qummīs, and perhaps other Shi‘i communities. Aḥmad b. Ishāq is identified as “the delegate of the Qummīs”

⁴² See Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of this hadith.

⁴³ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 289-90. See also end of Chapter 4 in which this report is quoted.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Wardrop, “Lives,” 187.

in his biographies in Ṭūsī and Najāshī, perhaps on the basis of this report. He appears in the *Tārīkh Qumm* as the Eleventh Imam's agent for endowments (*awqāf*) in Qumm,⁴⁵ which also ensured that he must have been travelling to and from Qumm regularly prior to the Occultation period.

The trope of the delegation to test Ja'far exists in various forms, including narratives which omit both Aḥmad b. Ishāq, or replace him with another Qummī, or omit mention of Qummīs altogether. Stories regarding Aḥmad b. Ishāq's involvement in the Qummī delegation are absent from Kulaynī's *Kāfī*, raising the possibility that the Qummī delegation narrative is later trope. In Kulaynī the closest approximation of this delegation narrative instead depicts a man from Egypt who goes first to Mecca, then Samarra to find the Imam, and encounters the 'bāb' who responds with a letter which demonstrates his legitimacy through miraculous knowledge.⁴⁶ The use of the word *bāb* in this instance, perhaps suggests an association between the trope of searching for the Imam, and a *ghulātī* or more broadly *bābī* sensibility. This is corroborated by the prominence of these kinds of reports in Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*. In Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, he quotes a similar kind of report, this time in which the messenger of a man from Balkh asks Ja'far for proofs which he is unable to give, and is therefore rejected.⁴⁷ However, while we must therefore situate these reports within a network of tropes, we can still identify at the core of this network three distinct narratives, and one tantalizing reference, in which the testing of Ja'far is associated with people from Qumm. In one report in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, there is no mention of any name, but, it is a group of Qummīs involved with questioning Ja'far.⁴⁸ In addition to the

⁴⁵ Hussain, *Occultation*, 93.

⁴⁶ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:523.

⁴⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488-9.

⁴⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475-6.

single report in the *Hidāya* in which Aḥmad b. Ishāq is depicted as questioning the knowledge of Ja‘far, there is another report in the *Hidāya* which tantalizingly mentions “the letter of Aḥmad b. Ishāq,” which arrived “that year at Ḥulwān,”⁴⁹ which may refer to the year of Aḥmad b. Ishāq’s death, for Aḥmad b. Ishāq is said to have died at Ḥulwān.⁵⁰ In context, it seems most likely that “the letter of Aḥmad b. Ishāq” refers to the correspondence with Ja‘far ‘the Liar’. All the delegation reports tend to take place soon after the death of al-‘Askarī, suggesting that Aḥmad b. Ishāq, too, probably died soon after al-‘Askarī. In the third report about the Qummīs and the testing of Ja‘far, instead of Aḥmad b. Ishāq, Ibn Bābūya’s report replaces him with another Qummī, whose family is familiar to us: Abū al-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī. This is perhaps the brother of ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, who was so instrumental in circulating reports of the existence of the Child Imam.⁵¹

Even though one report mentioned Aḥmad b. Ishāq as the leader of the Qummī delegation, and another mentions Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, these reports suggest that there was a key moment in which members of the Qummī elite made an alliance with a group of insiders in Samarra, perhaps members of the inner household, or the Eleventh Imam’s *wakīls*. We will now examine in detail this report in which Abū al-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī plays the central role in investigating and rejecting Ja‘far. While it appears to have undergone a fair amount of doctrinal re-construction which places its authenticity into question, it is precisely this doctrinal reconstruction which provides us an illuminating window into the gradual theologization of the early events of the Occultation era. I shall call this report the

⁴⁹ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 280.

⁵⁰ See Kashshī, 394, though this report also says that Aḥmad b. Ishāq wrote to Ibn Rawḥ, which seems to contradict the dating of the death Aḥmad b. Ishāq that I am suggesting here. All other reports, however, seem to place Aḥmad b. Ishāq as a pre-Occultation and early-Occultation figure.

⁵¹ It is also possible that the same person is intended, and the name has been corrupted. Both have the *kunya* Abū al-‘Abbās.

‘*nuwwāb* hadith’, due to its uniquely precise, yet transitional language about the intermediary role of the ‘deputies’ (*nuwwāb*) in this report. In the report, Abū al-‘Abbās Muḥammad b Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī, is instrumental in the inquisition of Ja‘far:

أبو الحسن علي بن سنان الموصلي قال : حدثني أبي قال : لما قبض سيدنا أبو محمد الحسن بن علي العسكري صلوات الله عليهما وفد من قم والجبال وفود بالأموال التي كانت تحمل على الرسم والعادة ، ولم يكن عندهم خبر وفاة الحسن عليه السلام ، فلما أن وصلوا إلى سر من رأى سألوا عن سيدنا الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام ، فقيل لهم : إنه قد فقد ، فقالوا : ومن وارثه ؟ قالوا : أخوه جعفر بن علي فسألوا عنه فقيل لهم إنه قد خرج منتزها وركب زورقا في الدجلة يشرب ومعه المغنون ، قال : فتشاور القوم فقالوا : هذه ليست من صفة الامام ، وقال بعضهم لبعض : امضوا بنا حتى نرد هذه الأموال على أصحابها . فقال أبو العباس محمد بن جعفر الحميري القمي : قفوا بنا حتى ينصرف هذا الرجل ونختبر أمره بالصحة . قال : فلما انصرف دخلوا عليه فسلموا عليه وقالوا : يا سيدنا نحن من أهل قم ومعنا جماعة من الشيعة وغيرها وكنا نحمل إلى سيدنا أبي محمد الحسن بن علي الأموال

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Sinān al-Mawṣilī said, my father told me: When our Lord (*sayyid*) Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-‘Askarī (SAA) was taken (in death), delegates (*wufūd*) came from the Jibāl and Qumm with money, according to usual practice and custom. But they did not know about al-Ḥasan's death (AS). When they arrived at Samarra they asked about our Lord and they were told that he had passed away, so [the delegates] said, “Who is his heir (*wārith*)?”

They said, “[Imam al-‘Askarī’s] brother, Ja‘far b. ‘Alī.”

And the delegates asked about him, and they were told, “He has gone out on a pleasure trip (*mutanazzihan*); he has embarked on a boat on the Tigris, drinking with his singers.”

He said: The people deliberated and said, “This does not fit the description of the Imam.”

And they said to each other, “Let us go, so as to return these monies to their owners.”

Then Abū al-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī said, “Let us stay until this man returns and inspect his status (*amr*)⁵² properly.”

And when he returned, they went in to him and greeted him and said, “Oh our Lord, we are from the people of Qumm, and we have a group of the *Shi‘a* with us, and others, and we were transporting monies to our Lord, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī [al-‘Askarī]”...⁵³

Ja‘far orders the delegates to hand the money over to him, and the delegates respond by telling him how al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī used to demonstrate his Imamic prerogative to collect the canonical taxes by predicting how much money was in each sack, and from whom. However, Ja‘far accuses them of lying, saying that this would suggest that his brother had made an impossible claim to knowledge of the unseen (*‘ilm-al-ghayb*),⁵⁴ which only God has, and he demands that they give him the money. The delegates, however, reject his demands for the money unless he produces the appropriate sign, saying,

إننا قوم مستأجرون وكلاء لأرباب هذه الأموال وهي وداعة لجماعة وأمرونا بأن لا نسلمها إلا بعلامة ودلالة ، وقد جرت بهذه العادة مع أبي محمد الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام

“We are hired people the agents of the owners of this money (*wukalā’ li-arbāb al-māl*), and we will not hand over the money except with certain signs which we knew from our Master, al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī [al-‘Askarī] (AS).”⁵⁵

⁵² Or perhaps “inspect his [claim to] leadership.”

⁵³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 477.

⁵⁴ It is Imami doctrine that the Imam should be understood to have knowledge of the unseen (*‘ilm al-ghayb*), see for example, Louis Gardet and Duncan MacDonald “Ghayb,” *EI2*.

⁵⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 477.

Ja'far then appeals to the Caliph, who hears the arguments of the delegates. Even the Caliph supports the delegates, saying, "The people are messengers, and nothing is incumbent upon a messenger except a clear communication (*al-balāgh al-mubīn*).” After this the delegates wait for a while until the Caliph provides them with an escort⁵⁶ out of the city, and as they are leaving, they encounter a beautiful youth (*ghulām*), a servant of the Twelfth Imam. They are led to al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī’s house and see the Twelfth Imam:

دخلنا دار مولانا الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام ، فإذا ولده القائم سيدنا عليه السلام قاعد على سرير كأنه فلقة قمر ، عليه ثياب خضر ، فسلمنا عليه ، فرد علينا السلام ، ثم قال : جملة المال كذا وكذا ديناراً ، حمل فلان كذا ، (وحمل) فلان كذا ، ولم يزل يصف حتى وصف الجميع . ثم وصف ثيابنا ورحالنا وما كان معنا من الدواب ، فخررنا سجداً لله عز - وجل شكراً لما عرفنا ، وقبلنا الأرض بين يديه ، وسألناه عما أردنا فأجاب ، فحملنا إليه الأموال ، وأمرنا القائم عليه السلام أن لا نحمل إلى سر من رأى بعدها شيئاً من المال ، فإنه ينصب لنا ببغداد رجلاً يحمل إليه الأموال ويخرج من عنده التوقيعات ، قالوا : فانصرفنا من عنده ودفع إلى أبي العباس محمد بن جعفر القمي الحميري شيئاً من الحنوط والكفن فقال له : أعظم الله أجرك في نفسك ، قال : فما بلغ أبو العباس عقبة همدان حتى توفي رحمه الله . وكان بعد ذلك نحمل الأموال إلى بغداد إلى النواب المنصوبين بها ويخرج من عندهم التوقيعات .

We entered the house of our Master (*mawlānā*) al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (AS) and lo! there was his son, the Qā’im, our Lord (*sayyidunā*) (AS) sitting upon a dais as if he were a shard of moon, wearing green clothes. We greeted him, and he returned our greeting... And we collected the money and gave it to him. And al-Qā’im (AS) ordered us not to bring anything to Samarra after that, but [he said] that he would appoint a man for us in Baghdad to whom to bring money and from whom rescripts (*tawqī‘āt*) would issue. They said: “So we went away from him and he gave to Abū al-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. Ja’far al-

⁵⁶ Interestingly enough, the word used for this functionary of the Caliph is *naqīb*, though this probably has nothing to do with the *naqīb* of the Ṭālibids.

Qummī al-Ḥimyarī some of the balm (*ḥunūt*) and the shroud (*kafan*), and he said to him:

“God has magnified your reward in your soul.”

He said: And no sooner did Abū al-‘Abbās reach ‘Aqabat Hamadān than he died (RAA), and after that we brought our money to Baghdad to the deputies (*nuwwāb*) appointed for it and from whom the rescripts (*tawqī‘āt*) issued.⁵⁷

This *nuwwāb* hadith has clear polemical aims: to show that Ja‘far is not the true Imam, while demonstrating the miraculous proofs of the Imamate of the Child Imam, and justifying the authority of early intermediaries of the Imams in the Occultation era. Central to our understanding of the historical dynamics of the report is the creation of an alliance between the Qummī community and the ‘deputies’ (*nuwwāb*) who, it is predicted, were henceforth to operate the Imam’s financial administration from Baghdad. While these deputies are not named, the possible candidates for this role are likely to be the high *wakīls* of the Occultation-era *nāḥiya*, or else the epistemic authorities who attested to the existence of the Hidden Imam through circulating reports about him.

It is notable that the miraculous proofs of the *nuwwāb* hadith are based on divining the amount and provenance of the canonical taxes due to him. That is, the mechanism of recognition is situated within the logic of the financial network, a logic that was the special prerogative of the *wakīls* who were responsible for receiving the Imam’s money on his behalf. The miracle of divination may have its origins, or have been suggested by certain mundane protocols of canonical tax-collection; the checking of collected canonical taxes against expected dues from the various communities, lists of *waqfs* and the incomes associated with particular prominent Imamis, and so on. This kind of report is part of a common trope in both Ibn Bābūya’s and

⁵⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 478-9.

Khaṣībī's proofs of the Occultation and the legitimacy of the authority of the *wakīls*, including both pre- and post- Occultation miracle stories about miraculous divination that are used as legitimations of the position of the high-*wakīls* as mediators for the Imam, as well as the miraculous knowledge of the Imam himself. It is significant to us that it is precisely knowledge of the financial network that is being advanced to establish the Imamate of the Twelfth Imam, and the relationship of the Qummīs with this Imam. Given the evidence of confusion and dissent regarding the holders of religious authority and its nature after al-‘Askarī, this report's depiction of the clean transition of authority to the deputies must reflect a later back-projection of *de facto* developments through which the high-*wakīls* did indeed successfully make the case that they were the officially designated deputies, the ‘*nuwwāb*’ for the Hidden Imam.⁵⁸ These deputies are depicted as providing continuity in receiving canonical taxes and issuing decrees – exactly those duties that were vested in the *wikāla*-network before the death of the Eleventh Imam. This statement about the Imam's deputies is perhaps the earliest theoretical justification for the *de facto* leadership of the *wakīls* which was established in the years following the death of the Eleventh Imam. Notably, however, there is no mention of the ‘Amrīs, or any other named *wakīls*, giving us the picture of a transitional stage in the doctrine of the representatives of the Hidden Imam: the shadowy, ambiguous figures of the *nāḥiya*, rather than the canonized figures of the Four Envoys.

And what of historicity? If this *nuwwāb* hadith and others like it demonstrate a development in the theoretical legitimization of the role of the *wakīls*, reflecting the stage that

⁵⁸ This word deputy/representative (*nā'ib*, pl. *nuwwāb*) is also significant in the history of Shi'ī authority, as it is under this term that the scholars later justify their own claims to represent the Hidden Imam in the Occultation era. See, for example, Sachedina, *Messianism*, 100-1.

their canonization had reached by the time of Ibn Bābūya, and very likely a generation earlier,⁵⁹ then does this create problems for the historicity of the Qummī role in rejecting Ja‘far? We might also worry that the Qummī transmitters of such reports are not reliable witnesses for the pious and sagacious actions of their Qummī descendants which happily resulted in the rejection of Ja‘far. While such skepticism is valid, however, we must acknowledge that the Qummīs who preserved these reports did so because their ideological interpretation of the past was formed by the real political experiences of their predecessors. While these reports may be a hagiographical myth of the alliance between the Qummī notables and the deputies of the hidden Imam, they must have had their roots in a real political alliance between Qummī actors and the Samarra and Baghdad insiders to the household of the Imam which continued to bear fruit in the institutional dynamics of the early-mid fourth/tenth century. The moment of this alliance set the political, institutional and ideological course of later Qummīs who wove traditions to interpret and justify the present-day effects of past decisions. From this perspective, we may say that it is precisely because an alliance *was* made between Qumm and the Samarran and Baghdadi insiders to the Imamate that Qumm was so prominent in the early Occultation period. That is to say, the reason that Aḥmad b. Iṣḥāq and the Ḥimyarīs appear in such heroic roles in these reports is because their intellectual and biological descendants were heirs to, and beneficiaries from, the alliance between Qumm and the insiders to the Imamate, or the *nāḥiya* as it was initially euphemistically known. Whatever the precise mechanisms for defeating Ja‘far and establishing the authority of the *wakīls*, and other Imamate insiders, it is clear that Qummī thinkers and actors were integral to this process. While there may have been Egyptians and Kufans who underwent similar

⁵⁹ In which case, this would place the hadith to around the time of his father, ‘Alī Ibn Bābūya, who died in 329/940-1.

processes, it was the Qummī-Baghdadi axis that emerged as the central axis of political and intellectual life in the new Occultation era. In addition, it is also likely that there were some historical events that formed the basis of this image. Given that Abū Sahl attests to the existence of a clique of companions of al-‘Askarī as attesting as continuing to represent the institutions of the Imamate to the community, when we seek to establish who this might be, the testimony of the Qummī tradition would seem to provide valuable clues. The question remains, however, whether these Qummī delegates should be seen as part of the old guard of al-‘Askarī’s followers who made up the *nāḥiya*, or whether they were merely outsiders who recognized the legitimacy of the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*. Again, the figure of Aḥmad b. Ishāq appears central to the answer.

5.8 Aḥmad b. Ishāq as *bāb* to the Child Imam

Aḥmad b. Ishāq appears in Kulaynī’s version of the *thiqa* hadith as the key figure in curating information about the Hidden Imam. In that hadith, he is seen to orchestrate ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far’s interaction with ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, producing the eyewitness account about the Child Imam. In the Qummī delegation report, Aḥmad b. Ishāq engineers the rejection of Ja‘far the liar as Imam. Other accounts give us an even greater sense of Aḥmad b. Ishāq’s involvement in the Occultation faction after the death of the Eleventh Imam.

So who was Aḥmad b. Ishāq? Najāshī gives the following information in his biography:

أحمد بن إسحاق بن عبد الله بن سعد بن مالك بن الأحوص الأشعري ، أبو علي القمي ، وكان وافد القميين ، وروى عن أبي جعفر الثاني وأبي الحسن عليهما السلام ، وكان خاصة أبي محمد عليه السلام ... من كتبه كتاب علل الصوم كبير ، مسائل الرجال لأبي الحسن الثالث عليه السلام جمعه .

Aḥmad b. Ishāq b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Sa‘īd b. Mālik b. al-Aḥwaṣ al-Ash‘arī Abū ‘Alī al-Qummī. He was the delegate (*wāfīd*) of the Qummīs. He transmitted from Abū Ja‘far the Second [al-Jawād] and Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī] (AS), and he was the special retainer

(*khaṣṣa*) of Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] (AS)... [Among his books are]: ... The Book of the Middle Terms of Fasting, large, Questions of the Men to Abū al-Ḥasan the Third [al-Hādī] (AS) which he collected.”⁶⁰

We can glean a number of important facts from this short biography. Aḥmad b. Ishāq was a member of the prominent and well-connected Ash‘arī family in Qumm.⁶¹ If he did indeed meet and transmit from the Ninth Imam, who died in 220/835, it is likely that he was born around 200/815 so would have been a venerable man at the death of the Eleventh Imam in 260/874. It is unlikely, then, that he would have survived Abū Ja‘far, in spite of one, clearly anachronistic report, which claims that he sent a request to go on Ḥajj to the Envoy, Ibn Rawḥ.⁶² In addition, his works give no indication that he survived into the era of Abū Ja‘far. The fact that he compiled a collection of *responsa* from the Tenth Imam, suggests that he was firmly associated with this Imam. Ṭūsī’s *Fihrist* largely replicates the information from Najāshī, with the addition of a book on ritual prayer. However, in both biographies there is a distinct absence of works mentioned which deal with the Eleventh Imam or the Twelfth Imam and the Occultation period. Ṭūsī, in his *Rijāl*, also lists him among the companions of the Eleventh Imam.⁶³ While we have no reason to doubt that he was an important figure amongst the Qummī Shi‘a, the fact that he is listed as their delegate is perhaps drawn from the reports about the Qummī delegation, rather than being an independent corroboration of them. There are, however, some reports that give Aḥmad b. Ishāq an even greater role in the early Occultation, depicting him as in communication with the Twelfth Imam, and as the preeminent *wakīl* who delivered his rescripts.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 91. Ṭūsī has much the same details, with slightly different book titles, *Fihrist*, 70.

⁶¹ See Newman, *Formative Period*, Chapter Four, 50-61, for details of the Ash‘arī family.

⁶² Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 394.

⁶³ Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 397.

⁶⁴ See Ibn Rustum, *Dalā‘il*, 503, and further discussion of the role of Aḥmad b. Ishāq below.

There are several accounts that mention his death at Ḥulwān at the foot of the Zagros mountains in Iran, on his way back to Qumm from Ḥajj or a visit to the Eleventh Imam's house in Samarra,⁶⁵ though a date is not mentioned, it appears to be soon after the death of the Eleventh Imam. One account mentions that Kāfūr the Eunuch, a servant of al-‘Askarī, washed the corpse of Aḥmad b. Ishāq after his death at Ḥulwān, saying that Aḥmad had, “the noblest position of all of you with regard to your Lord [the Imam].” After this, Kāfūr miraculously disappears.⁶⁶ While this account is miraculous and hagiographical,⁶⁷ it does suggest that there were those who sought to circulate reports glorifying the position of Aḥmad b. Ishāq. In a yet more explicit report in Ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī's *Dalā'il al-imāma*, the reputation of Aḥmad b. Ishāq is dealt with immediately after the mention of the names of the Twelfth Imam, and his birth date, and the death date of the Eleventh Imam. This is the position in which, according to the structure of the other chapters of *Dalā'il al-imāma*, we would expect to find mention of the Imam's major spokesperson, *bāb*, (or *bawwāb* as Ibn Rustum idiosyncratically puts it).⁶⁸ While Ibn Rustum does not explicitly call Aḥmad b. Ishāq a *bāb*, but instead, a *wakīl*, this positioning does imply that Aḥmad b. Ishāq had the role of a quasi-*bāb*, suggesting again the slippage between the two:

وكان أحمد بن إسحاق القمي الأشعري (رضي الله عنه) الشيخ الصدوق ، وكيل أبي محمد (عليه السلام) ، فلما مضى أبو محمد (عليه السلام) إلى كرامة الله (عز وجل) أقام على وكالته مع مولانا صاحب الزمان (صلوات

⁶⁵ Ibn Rustum, *Dalā'il*, 503.

⁶⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 464-5.

⁶⁷ This kind of report closely follows the trope of posthumous recognition by the Imam of his favored followers, including the *nuwwāb* hadith in which Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Qummī al-Ḥimyarī is provided with funerary items, demonstrating the Imam's favor and also the miraculous foreknowledge of his death.

⁶⁸ *Bāb* means ‘gateway’, while *bawwāb* means ‘doorman’. It is possible that these words were used synonymously in this context. However, it is also likely that this amendment was made by a later copyist or redactor who wanted to remain faithful to the text of Ibn Rustum, but felt uncomfortable with the *ghulāt* associations of the term *bāb*. However, the usage of the word is clearly the same. Thus, Ibn Nuṣayr and others of the canonical *bābs* of the Nuṣayrī canon like ‘Umar b. al-Furāt for the ninth Imam, and Salmān al-Fārīsī for ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib are included in Ibn Rustum's mentioned ‘*bawwābs*’. If Ibn Rustum had felt uncomfortable with the concept of *bāb*, then he would probably not have included Ibn Nuṣayr's name among these figures.

الله عليه) تخرج إليه توقعاته ، ويحمل إليه الأموال من سائر النواحي التي فيها موالى مولانا ، فتسلمها إلى أن استأذن في المصير إلى قم ، فخرج الإذن بالمضي ، وذكر أنه لا يبلغ إلى قم ، وأنه يمرض ويموت في الطريق ، فمرض بخلوان ومات ودفن بها (رضي الله عنه) . وأقام مولانا (صلوات الله عليه) بعد مضي أحمد بن إسحاق الأشعري بسر من رأى مدة ، ثم غاب لما روي في الغيبة من الأخبار عن السادة (عليهم السلام) ، مع ما أنه مشاهد في المواطن الشريفة الكريمة العالية ، والمقامات العظيمة ، وقد دلت الآثار على صحة مشاهدته (عليه السلام)

And Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Qummī al-Ash‘arī (RAA), the truth-telling Shaykh was the *wakīl* of Abū Muḥammad al-‘Askarī (AS), and when Abū Muḥammad (AS) passed to the bounty (*karāma*) of God (AJ), he continued in his *wakīl*-ship (*aqāma ‘alā wikālatihi*) with our Master (*mawlā*) the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) (SAA), the rescripts (*tawqī‘āt*) being issued to him. And he carried the money to [the Hidden Imam] from all the other regions (*nawāḥī*) in which the followers of our Master were, and he handled them (*tasallama*), until he sought permission on to go to Qumm, and the permission to go away (*muḍiyy*) was issued, and it was mentioned that he never reached Qumm, but that he sickened and died on the road, and he sickened at Ḥulwān, and died, and was buried there (RAA). And Our Master (SAA) lived at Samarra for a while after the death of Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Ash‘arī, then he disappeared (*ghāba*) according to what is transmitted regarding the Occultation from the reports (*akhbār*) from the Lords (AS) [i.e. the earlier Imams] although he has been witnessed (*mushāhad*) in high, noble, honorable locations and great situations, and the reports have indicated the soundness of the witnessing of him (AS).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ibn Rustum al-Tabari, *Dalā‘il*, 503.

This report has no *isnād*, and so represents the opinion of the author, based on reports whose genealogy we have no way of tracing. It does not appear to have been generated only in the Fifth/Eleventh century, however, for it contradicts the classical narrative of the canonical Four Envoys by suggesting a preeminent position for Aḥmad b. Ishāq. This report leaves no Occultation-era role for ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, who is represented in *Dalāʿil al-imāma* as the *bāb*⁷⁰ of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams.⁷¹

If we accept the testimony of *Dalāʿil al-imāma*, then Aḥmad b. Ishāq has a strong case to be considered one of the early prominent members of the old guard of the Occultation faction. The mention of Samarra is particularly noteworthy as it suggests that the memory persisted of a Samarran center of authority in the earliest phase of the Occultation. According to a report quoted by Ṭūsī,⁷² Aḥmad b. Ishāq was regularly coming and going between Qumm and Samarra during the life of the Eleventh Imam. The central role of a Qummī delegate familiar with the inner workings of the Samarra Imamate would explain the formation of a Samarra-Qumm axis as the foundational dynamic in the early Occultation period. Even if we do not accept the testimony of *Dalāʿil al-imāma* as historical, we nonetheless have to account for the fact that, by the time of Ibn Rustum, the figure of Aḥmad b. Ishāq had undergone some of the same kinds of doctrinal elaboration that we have seen with ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, both as an eyewitness (see the previous chapter), and as someone who was depicted as having acted on the Imam’s behalf. This role is in direct contradiction with the canonical account of a sequence of designated Envoys starting with ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, for here, Aḥmad b. Ishāq is depicted in that same role in the first phase of the Occultation. Again, this suggests that elements of *de facto* political dynamics in the early-

⁷⁰ Again, Ibn Rustum uses the word *bawwāb* (doorkeeper), where one would expect to see *bāb* (gateway).

⁷¹ Ibn Rustum al-Tabari, *Dalāʿil*, 411, 425.

⁷² See Chapter 6.

Occultation Shi'i community were picked up and emphasized by later thinkers in order to create pantheons and canons supporting the Occultation idea and the structures of authority implied by it during the new era.

Another striking element of the *Dalā'il*'s depiction of the role of Aḥmad b. Ishāq, is that the occurrence of the Occultation is directly tied to Aḥmad b. Ishāq's death. This suggests that Aḥmad b. Ishāq claimed to be representing a visible, unocculted Child Imam, based in Samarra, who went into Occultation only after the death of his intermediary, Aḥmad b. Ishāq. Again, this may well be the result of later elaborations, but it suggests that Aḥmad b. Ishāq was a significant figure in the presentation of the idea of the Child Imam. Beyond the testimony of the *Dalā'il*, Aḥmad b. Ishāq appears primarily in this role of an epistemic touchstone, a guarantor of knowledge regarding the existence of the Hidden Imam: a *bāb*, in the sense of intermediary, rather than a *wakīl* who collected and distributed money. While Ibn Rustum calls Aḥmad b. Ishāq a *wakīl*, the biographical dictionaries mention him as an elite retainer (*khāṣṣa* pl. *khawāṣṣ*) of the Eleventh Imam,⁷³ but not a *wakīl*. He is then, something of a hybrid figure: both scholar and tax-collector, Qummī but also apparently based in Samarra. It may be that this reflects his historical role as a mediator between the two worlds of Qumm and Samarra, or it may be that the figure of Aḥmad b. Ishāq as presented in the *Dalā'il* is pieced together by conflating two early archetypes of the *wakīl* and the scholar. In general, the *wakīls* represented a slightly different aspect of the Imami elite, with a distinctive role of their own that should be considered separately from that of the scholars and hadith transmitters.

⁷³ Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 225; Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 70.

5.9 To tax or not to tax?

While the continuity of the tax-collection network is central to the logic of the reports which prove the existence of the Hidden Imam, the maintenance of tax-collection was not, however, an easy task. There was the potential for a lapse in continuity from both sides of the tax-collection relationship: the tax-collectors and the tax-donors. We have seen a dramatization of the problems of the tax-donors in the Qummī delegation reports. What of the tax-collectors? In spite of the confusion following the death of al-‘Askarī, certain *wakīls* did continue to collect money on behalf of the Imam. As the *nuwwāb* hadith, and other delegation reports suggest, the initial thrust of continuity in tax-collection came as much from the dispersed Shi‘i communities delivering money, as it did from centralizing ambitions from insiders to the Imamate. On the death of the Eleventh Imam, people continued to arrive with money for the Imam, and they had to make decisions about whether to deliver this money, or return it to the communities who entrusted it to them. Nonetheless, we can also see evidence of active attempts by the *wakīls* to collect money being met with resistance from the community. We have seen in the previous chapter, how this resistance manifested itself among Ja‘far’s followers, some of whom are depicted as having misappropriated money from villagers in Ja‘far’s name. Reports like the *nuwwāb* hadith depict a clean and immediate transition to bringing taxes to the *wakīls* following their attempt to bring canonical taxes to Ja‘far ‘the Liar’. However, given the attempts of Ja‘far to take hold of the Imam’s property, and his house, and the resistance of the Imam’s mother, even if the old *wakīls* represented continuity in a personnel, there must have been a break. And it cannot have been so simple for people to determine who should receive their canonical taxes after the death of the Eleventh Imam. One report in Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*, we are given an intimation of these difficulties:

علي بن محمد ، عن سعد بن عبد الله قال : إن الحسن بن النضر وأبا صدام وجماعة تكلموا بعد مضي أبي محمد عليه السلام فيما في أيدي الوكلاء وأرادوا الفحص

‘Alī b. Muḥammad >>>

Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh said: Al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr and Abū Ṣaddām and a group of others (*jamā‘a*) debated (*takallamū*) after the death of Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] about what was in the hands of the *wakīls* and they wanted an investigation (*al-faḥṣ*).⁷⁴

Here, then, clear doubt is expressed regarding the legitimacy of the *wakīls*, and the licitness of their continuing to hold on to the money of the Eleventh Imam. Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya* carries the same report, but with an extra detail:

عن أبي القاسم سعد بن أبي خلف قال : كان الحسن بن النضر وأبو صدام وجماعة تكلموا معي بعد مضي أبي الحسن (عليه السلام) في ما كان في يد الوكلاء وازدادوا القبط

Abū al-Qāsim Sa‘d b. Abī Khalaf [=Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qummī] said: Al-Ḥasan b. al-Naṣr and Abū Ṣaddām and a group of others (*jamā‘a*) spoke with me after the passing of Abū al-Ḥasan [*sic*]⁷⁵ about what was in the hands of the *wakīls*, and they were seeking additional dues^{76, 77}.

In Khaṣībī’s version, the community is distrustful of the *wakīls* not only because of what they have in their possession, but also because of their attempts to collect additional dues from the community. This provides suggests an initial push-back against the attempts of the *wakīls* to perpetuate the institutions of the Imamate in the absence of an Imam. We will see more of this resistance when we discuss the career of Abū Ja‘far.

⁷⁴ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:517-518.

⁷⁵ This hadith clearly refers to the time of al-‘Askarī, and so should read Abū Muḥammad (al-‘Askarī), instead of Abū al-Ḥasan (al-Hādī).

⁷⁶ Reading here *qabaḍ* instead of *qabt*.

⁷⁷ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277.

The report continues on to vindicate the *wakīls* by providing evidence for their miraculous function within the mechanisms of the Imamate, or rather the *nāḥiya*, as it is now referred to:

فجاء الحسن بن النضر إلى أبي الصدام فقال : إني أريد الحج فقال له : أبو صدام أخره هذه السنة ، فقال له الحسن [ابن النضر] : إني أفرع في المنام ولا بد من الخروج وأوصى إلى أحمد بن يعلى بن حماد وأوصى للناحية بمال وأمره أن لا يخرج شيئاً إلا من يده إلى يده بعد ظهور ، قال : فقال الحسن : لما وافيت بغداد اكرتيت داراً فنزلتها فجاءني بعض الوكلاء بثياب ودنانير وخلفها عندي ، فقلت له ما هذا ؟ قال هو ما ترى ، ثم جاءني آخر بمثلها وآخر حتى كبسوا الدار ، ثم جاءني أحمد بن إسحاق بجميع ما كان معه فتعجبت وبقيت متفكراً فوردت علي رقعة الرجل عليه السلام إذا مضى من النهار كذا وكذا فاحمل ما معك ، فرحلت وحملت ما معي وفي الطريق صعوك يقطع الطريق في ستين رجلاً فاجتزت عليه وسلمني الله منه فوافيت العسكر ونزلت ، فوردت علي رقعة أن احمل ما معك فعبيته في صنان الحمالين ، فلما بلغت الدهليز إذا فيه أسود قائم فقال : أنت الحسن ابن النضر ؟ قلت : نعم ، قال : ادخل ، فدخلت الدار ودخلت بيتاً وفرغت صنان الحمالين وإذا في زاوية البيت خبز كثير فأعطى كل واحد من الحمالين رغيفين وأخرجوا وإذا بيت عليه ستر فنوديت منه : يا حسن بن النضر احمد الله على ما من به عليك ولا تشكن ، فود الشيطان أنك شككت ، وأخرج إلي ثوبين وقيل : خذها فستحتاج إليهما فأخذتهما وخرجت ، قال . سعد : فانصرف الحسن بن النضر ومات في شهر رمضان وكفن في الثوبين

Al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr came to Abū al-Ṣaddām and said, “I want to make the Hajj.”

Abū Ṣaddām said, “Delay it this year.”⁷⁸

But al-Ḥasan [b. al-Naḍr] said to him: “I was frightened in a dream, and it is necessary [for me] to leave.” And he appointed as his executor (*awṣā*) Aḥmad b. Ya‘lā b. Ḥammād, and he bequeathed money to the *nāḥiya* (*awṣā li-al-nāḥiya bi-māl-in*), and he ordered

⁷⁸ This suggests that Abū al-Ṣaddām may be acting as a representative of the Imam, channeling his miraculous foreknowledge, or it may just refer to disturbances in Iraq and Arabia caused by the Zanj and the Qarāmiṭa or simple bandits, suggested later in the report by the bandit who attacks the caravan.

him not to pay anything out except from his hand to his [Twelfth Imam's] hand after his reappearance (*zuhūr*).⁷⁹

[Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh] said: And al-Ḥasan said: When I reached Baghdad, I rented a house, and I stayed in it, and one of the *wakīls* came to me with robes and dinars, and left them with me. And I said to him, "What's this?"

He said, "It is what you see."

Then another came to me with the same, and another, until they paid for the house (*kasabū al-dār*).⁸⁰ Then Aḥmad b. Iṣḥāq came to me with all of what was with him, and I was amazed, and I remained thinking, and a note (*ruq'a*) from the man [Imam] arrived: "When it passes from the day of such and such, then carry what is with you."

So I set off, and I carried what was with me, and in the route there was a bandit who held up sixty men, but I passed him; God kept me safe from him, and I arrived at the 'Askar [in Samarra], and I took up lodgings, and a note arrived to me telling me to carry what I had with me, and I loaded it into the porters' basket (*ṣanān al-ḥammālīn*),⁸¹ and when I reached the entrance hall (*dihlīz*), lo! there was a black man standing, and he said, "Are you al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr?"

And I said, "Yes,"

He said, "Come in."

⁷⁹ This decision is an important indication of the early origin of one of the options discussed by the *fuqahā'* regarding the question of payment of *khums* during the era of Occultation: designating a trustworthy executor to hand it over to the Imam on his return. See Calder, "Khums," 40.

⁸⁰ This perhaps suggests that *wakīls* coming to the *nāḥiya* were compensated for the accommodation expenses while staying in Samarra or Baghdad.

⁸¹ Lane, notes that *ṣann* is a larged covered basket, but does not list the form *ṣanān*. Mazandarānī says that *ṣinn* means basket, and *ṣanān/ṣinān* means the same, but does not provide vocalization. *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, 7:341.

And I entered a room and I emptied the porters' basket and lo! in the corner of the room was lots of bread, and he gave every one of the porters loaves and they went out, and lo! there was a room upon which was a curtain, and I was called from it, "Oh Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr, praise God for the bounty he has heaped upon you and do not doubt then love Satan, indeed you have doubted!"

And he sent out to me two cloths and it was said, "Take them, for you will have need of them."

And I took them and I went out.

Sa'd said: And al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr returned and he died in the month of Ramaḍān, and he was shrouded in the two cloths.⁸²

Two elements should be drawn out here. Firstly, we should note the narrative progression from doubt to acceptance of the *wakīls* as representatives of the Hidden Imam. This progression fulfils a rhetorical task of cementing the legitimacy of the *wakīls*, but also reflects a real historical progression; there really was a progression from the late third/ninth century to the mid fourth/tenth century, from doubting the Hidden Imam, to accepting him as doctrine. It is notable that the protagonists are seen to change their opinion regarding the proper destination for the canonical taxes. Initially they display confusion and doubt, but then they affirm the legitimacy of the *wakīls*. The miraculous proofs are familiar from other evidentiary reports of the early Occultation era, especially the miraculous foreknowledge of the death of the protagonist, displayed through the ritual gift of funerary items to the Imam's follower who subsequently Though that this report deploys devices which are well-established literary tropes, these are very likely based on the mechanisms of persuasion used by the *wakīls* to establish their legitimacy.

⁸² Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:517-518.

The fact that these mechanisms were well-established tropes would only have increased their efficacy in establishing the institutional continuity under conditions of crisis. The various mechanisms of proof; the pomp of the Imamic establishment, surrounded as it is by a retinue of loyal *wakīls* and servants participating in the Imam's miraculous and sacred aura, the cooption of the doubting man by entrusting him with the Imam's money, and eventually, the protagonist being led to the voice of the Imam emerging from behind the curtain, also call to mind other mechanisms employed by other claimants to Imamate or representation of the Imam, including Ja'far 'the Liar',⁸³ and Badr the Eunuch,⁸⁴ who also attempt to affect the archetypal Imamic establishment. All these claimants employed the recognized language of Imamic pomp and symbolism which was presumably well-established by then, echoing the pomp of the Caliph and the houses of other powerful men,⁸⁵ but also containing a symbolism bound up with the fiscal protocols of Imami Shi'ism.

The high-*wakīls*, then, were certainly not inactive even in the early years after the death of the Eleventh Imam. Clearly they were engaged in an effort to maintain the tax-base of the Imamate, in the face of a crisis in continuity, and even if there was no firm vision for the new era established in the first years, the *wakīls* attempted to ensure continuity. On the other hand, the communities themselves had an interest in maintaining continuity in their ritual activities, of which tax-payment was a part, and their search for the identity of the Imam was an important aspect of the thrust towards continuity in the earliest period. Solutions to this were not uniform. While there may have been some *wakīls* who were successful in convincing local communities to

⁸³ See the elaborate arrangements made in order to approach Ja'far recounted in Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*, 293-7.

⁸⁴ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 281-2.

⁸⁵ For the details of the life and protocols of rich households in this period, a useful work is M. M. Ahsan, *Social life under the Abbasids, 170-289 AH, 786-902 AD*, (London; New York: Longman, 1979).

continue to pay their canonical taxes even in the era of uncertainty, our sources also contain hints that some Qummīs and others decided to wait to see who to deliver their canonical taxes to, or else to bequeath them to posterity,⁸⁶ or to return them to their donors.⁸⁷ The maintenance of continuity required the establishment of an operational consensus between two sides: the donors and the collectors, these two logics could also meet in a middleman like Aḥmad b. Ishāq who seems both to have been a representative for his local Qummī community, but was also a representative of the Imamate to the larger community. This factor of having a foot in two worlds would have allowed for the establishment of a kind of fragile consensus regarding the necessity for continuity – at least between Samarra and Qumm, initially. It is likely that only once the messy business of the Imam’s house and his inheritance, and the claims of the phantom pregnancy were dealt with, that some stability could be achieved, and doctrinal and institutional foundations could be stabilized upon the basis of a new *status quo* which might be defensible to a wider community of believers beyond Samarra and Qumm, a *status quo* in which members of the family of the Imams like Ja‘far and Ḥudayth were less important than the institutional and epistemic authorities: the *wakīls* and the Qummī hadith-preservers.

5.10 The coercion of the Ṭālibids

One report in Kulaynī gives an intriguing window into the political relations between the *nāḥiya* and the powerful ‘Alid families. Notably the reporter of this report is a *mawlā* whose patron was the daughter of the Ninth Imam, therefore a cousin once-removed of the Eleventh Imam.

⁸⁶ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:517-518. Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277.

⁸⁷ In one report, indeed, the Qummīs are ordered to do bring their *khums* back to Qumm by the Hidden Imam himself. Khaṣībī *Hidāya*, 256-7.

علي بن محمد ، عن الفضل الخزاز المدائني مولى خديجة بنت محمد أبي جعفر عليه السلام قال : إن قوما من أهل المدينة من الطالبين كانوا يقولون بالحق وكانت الوظائف ترد عليهم في وقت معلوم ، فلما مضى أبو محمد عليه السلام رجع قوم منهم عن القول بالولد فوردت الوظائف على من ثبت منهم على القول بالولد وقطع عن الباقين ، فلا يذكر في الذاكرين والحمد لله رب العالمين .

‘Alī b. M>>>>

Al-Faḍl al-Khazzāz al-Madā’inī *mawlā* of Khadīja bt. Muḥammad Abū Ja‘far:⁸⁸ A group of the people of Medina from amongst the Ṭālibids testified to the truth. However, the stipends (*waḥā’if*) were diverted from them at a well-known time (*fī waqt ma’lūm*); for when Abū Muḥammad died a group of them recanted from attesting to the Child, and so the stipends came to whoever among them attested to the Child, but [the money] was cut off from the others.”⁸⁹

This suggests that in spite of the perplexity, the *nāḥiya* had the connections to ensure real means of coercion to persuade the elite Ṭālibid families to support the Occultation faction. It suggests that even at this early stage there was some connection between the insiders of the *wakīlate* and their contacts amongst the caliphal authorities and the *naqībs* who were appointed by the authorities to distribute stipends to the members of the family of the Prophet,⁹⁰ many of whom would have Shi‘i leanings. If we recall the maneuvers of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ we also note that he was depicted as petitioning the Caliph regarding his inheritance and succession to the position of the Eleventh Imam, and he was also depicted as visiting the *naqīb* in Samarra, the official in

⁸⁸ Given the access this man has to the inner circles of the family of the Prophet, he may be the client of the daughter of the son of Imam ‘Alī al-Hādī.

⁸⁹ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:518-19.

⁹⁰ See John Donahue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334 H./945 to 403 H./1012: Shaping Institutions for the Future* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 313, and also Teresa Bernheimer, *The ‘Alids: the First Family of Islam, 750-1200* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

charge of distributing stipends to the Ṭālibids. This may suggest that the office of *naqīb* might have been influential in guaranteeing the support of the Ṭālibids for any particular solution to the leadership of the family of the Prophet and therefore also the identity of the Imam. This report raises the possibility that the *naqīb*, and perhaps therefore also some actors amongst the caliphal authorities were tacitly in support of the *wakīls* who came to form the Occultation faction. If this were true, this would be the earliest attestation to political activities of the office of *naqīb*.⁹¹

In the early years, the search for the Imam appears in some reports to have been associated with the Ḥijāz, in particular Medina and its environs; the traditional location of the family of the Imams.⁹² This reflects both the political activities amongst elite Imamis at the time. As we have seen in the stipends hadith, the *wakīls* appear to have had influence among the elite families in Medina. Ḥudayth, the mother of the Eleventh Imam was based in Medina and had to travel quickly to Samarra to contest the inheritance when he died.⁹³ The focus of attention towards the Ḥijāz may also have been the mere expression of nostalgia for the old Medina-based Imamate that existed from the time of Bāqir and Ṣādiq until the Ninth Imam, Jawād,⁹⁴ and certainly some element of these reports were generated through an *ex post facto* doctrinal elaboration on pre-existent hadith, rather than reflecting any historical developments in this period.⁹⁵ The reports which locate the Imam near Medina tend to have little mention of *wakīls* or

⁹¹ This reference to the *naqīb* of the Ṭālibids appears to be one of the earliest we have, establishing a *terminus post quem* for the establishment of the office.

⁹² See previous chapter.

⁹³ See Chapter 4.

⁹⁴ On the whole, the reports that give details of operations in Samarra and Baghdad are quite different from the archetypal, mythic reports of the Imam appearing in Mecca, in which there is a great continuity between the pre-*ghayba* and *ghayba* era reports. The Meccan reports are filled with notes of mystery and miracle, and the functionaries of the Imam themselves appear as miraculous and mysterious, rather than named historical characters, known to their audience. See, for example Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 443-4.

⁹⁵ For the *wāqifi* precedents for the Occultation of the Qā'im taking place in or near Medina, see Ghaemmaghami, "Seeing the Proof," 81-3.

the mechanisms of canonical tax-collection.⁹⁶ In this case, it appears that claims which situate the Imam in the Ḥijāz are likely to have been generated more by these literary expectations than by the institutional location of the *nāḥiya* in the Ḥijāz.

5.11 The shift from Samarra to Baghdad and the politics of the caliphal court

According to the *nuwwāb* hadith analyzed above, the Twelfth Imam explicitly predicts the shifting of the center of community leadership from Samarra to Baghdad:

وأمرنا القائم عليه السلام أن لا نحمل إلى سر من رأى بعدها شيئا من المال ، فإنه ينصب لنا ببغداد رجلا يحمل إليه
الأموال ويخرج من عنده التوقيعات

And al-Qā'im (AS) ordered us not to bring anything to Samarra after that, but [said] that he would appoint a man for us in Baghdad to whom to bring money and from whom rescripts (*tawqī'āt*) would issue.⁹⁷

However, we have various reports about continued payments made by community members to representatives based in Samarra, not merely Baghdad. If canonical tax-payments did indeed continue, then it would make sense for these payments to continue to have been directed to Samarra, at least initially. As we have seen, this is corroborated by Ibn Rustum's short biography of Aḥmad b. Ishāq, in which he mentions that the Hidden Imam "lived at Samarra for a while after the death of Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Ash'arī, then he disappeared (*ghāba*)."⁹⁸ Again, this suggests that initially the *wakīls* were based in Samarra, and continued to act on behalf of an Imam in Samarra, if only for a very short time, before the move to base the *nāḥiya* in Baghdad. Hitherto, little attention has been drawn to the shift from Samarra to Baghdad, but it does suggest an important milestone in the earliest developments of the Twelver synthesis, and the rise of the

⁹⁶ See, for example, the depiction of Badr in Chapter 4.

⁹⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 478.

⁹⁸ See Ibn Rustum al-Tabari, *Dalā'il*, 50, and above.

wakīls, and it allows us to establish a clearer chronology of the events depicted in the early Occultation-era sources, for we can assume that all Samarra-related reports pre-date the reports which depict the *nāḥiya* as being centered on Baghdad.

Before the rise of Abū Ja‘far in Baghdad, our sources indicate that there were, indeed, *wakīls* operating in Samarra, in contradiction to the Imam’s statement in the *nuwwāb* hadith. Samarra was where the Tenth and Eleventh Imams lived, and where their tombs were located, so it is unsurprising that we find many reports of the high *wakīls* continuing to operate from Samarra. Very often, these Samarra reports refer to the *wikāla* as a largely anonymous leadership, the *nāḥiya*, or refer euphemistically to sending money to ‘the Creditor’, *al-gharīm*, presumably meaning the Imam to whom canonical taxes are due.⁹⁹ In other cases the *nāḥiya* is represented by names that are strikingly absent from the classical list of the ‘Four Envoys’ which was ultimately canonized by Ṭūsī. We have mentioned Aḥmad b. Ishāq. Another name that occurs is Abū al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad al-Wakīl,¹⁰⁰ who may be the same as Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, whom al-Shaykh al-Mufīd calls “the Envoy (*safīr*) in those days.”¹⁰¹ Another important figure is variously known as Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshā’, sometimes known as al-Ḥājizī who may have been the preeminent *wakīl* in the earliest period after al-‘Askarī’s death. The sources do not provide much clarity, but the *wakīls* at this period appear to be operating with some activities both in Samarra and Baghdad, while the Imam is still represented as residing in Samarra.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ See Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 293.

¹⁰¹ Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-irshād fī ma‘rifat ḥujjat allāh ‘alā al-‘ibād* (Beirut: Mu‘assasat āl al-bayt, 1414/1993), 360. However, the same hadith as reported in Kulaynī’s *Kāfī* does not use the word Envoy (*safīr*) suggesting that this is a post-Nu‘mānī identification. *Kāfī*, 1:520-1.

¹⁰² See, for example, the somewhat equivocal evidence of Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*, 1:521, which seems either to suggest that Ḥājiz is receiving money on behalf of the Imam in Samarra, or conversely that the Imam sends a believer away from Samarra back to Ḥājiz (perhaps in Baghdad). This may foreshadow the interaction between Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī and the hidden *wakīl*, see Chapter 7.

Sachedina suggests that “besides the Four Agents there were many others who were known to hold the *sifāra* of the Imam and were entrusted to collect *khums* tax.”¹⁰³ But given the absence of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd from such narratives, and rupture between the old guard and the newer generation of Abū Ja‘far, we can state that *wakīls* like Ḥājiz and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad were collecting money with no involvement from the canonical Four Envoys (or Four Agents).

It is likely that while the activities of the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya* may have initially been centered upon Samarra, they would increasingly have been shifted to Baghdad, and in the era of the Envoys, we see Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī and Ibn Rawḥ as exclusively based in Baghdad. There are a number of causes that might have prompted the rerouting of canonical taxes to Baghdad instead of the Imam’s house in Samarra. If al-‘Askarī’s mother, Ḥudayth, was accepted as the representative of the Child Imam, as perhaps she was, then taxes might well have been sent to her while she lived in the Imam’s house in Samarra. If, as the evidence suggests, some *wakīls* were unhappy with the fact of a woman representing the Imam’s legacy, it may have caused problems for them to operate in Samarra.¹⁰⁴ Or the interruption in transmitting canonical taxes may have occurred when an even greater obstacle by the inheritance dispute, and the death of Ḥudayth when Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ inherited the house of the Imam: then, it would have become suddenly difficult or impossible for followers of the Child Imam to send canonical taxes to the Imam’s house in Samarra.¹⁰⁵ The fact that, in the *nuwwāb* hadith, the Twelfth Imam is depicted as specifying that his financial administration would shift from Samarra to Baghdad suggests that it was not an intuitive move, but required explicit Imamic justification, to be expressed as doctrine in the form of a hadith.

¹⁰³ Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 88.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁵ See previous chapter.

One important reason why the shift away from Samarra made sense, is that the Caliph Mu‘taḍid moved his capital back to Baghdad in 279/892, after more than half a century with Samarra as capital,¹⁰⁶ coinciding roughly with the probably dates of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’'s death. In the *nuwwāb* hadith and various other reports addressed in the previous chapter, Ja‘far is depicted as appealing in vain to the arbitration of the Caliph, and to the Khāqānid vizier ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān.¹⁰⁷ This suggests that the caliphal authorities may have been happy for Ja‘far to fail, and it may have been a moment in which those who were close to the caliphal court had the opportunity to benefit from the patronage of powerful men. This is speculative, but by the time of the Envoy Ibn Rawḥ, we do not need to resort to speculation to see that strong connections between figures in the *nāḥiya* and the court had been established. Even earlier, however, by the 880s and 890s, Shi‘i viziers like Ibn Bulbul, and bureaucrats like the Ibn al-Furāt family had gained footholds of powerful influence in the fragmented political scene of the Samarra Caliphate after the return to Baghdad. Though the prominence of Ibn Bulbul was cut short soon after, this was a crucial moment in which to have prominent Shi‘i supporters in the caliphal court. It is very likely, then, that the move of the Imami financial administration to Baghdad, at around the same time of the shift of the Caliphate back to Baghdad, was due to the importance of the associations of the Imami elite with the caliphal bureaucratic class and the court.¹⁰⁸ We will return to this theme when we discuss the career of Ibn Rawḥ.

¹⁰⁶ Alistair Northedge, “Sāmarrā’,” *EI2*.

¹⁰⁷ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 505-6; Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475-6.

¹⁰⁸ Ismā‘īl Ibn Bulbul served as vizier of the Caliphate from 265/878 to 278/891-892. See Newman, *Formative Period*, 16-17. Newman strongly emphasizes the links between the developments in the Shi‘i community and politics of the court, saying, “the fortunes [of the Shi‘a elite] continued to be tied to, and thus dependent on, the favour of the court and, therefore, the political machinations which underlay the latter’s functioning and composition.” This statement remains to be proved, but certainly there is circumstantial evidence in the form of contacts between later Shi‘i leaders and the court to suggest that links must have been forged in this period, and the relocation of the *nāḥiya* at around the same time as the relocation of the court appears to confirm this idea.

5.12 Ḥājiz as Envoy

As a further complication to the canonical narrative of ‘Amrī authority, the figure of Ḥājiz appears in our earliest sources as acting in an Envoy-like capacity, receiving the canonical taxes, and issuing rescripts. In Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list of the *wakīls* who saw the Imam, Ḥājiz as one of the *wakīls* for Baghdad,¹⁰⁹ though al-Asadī himself succeeds him and operates from Rayy, and indeed, many of the donors who seek Ḥājiz out do come from the east, suggesting that his influence was focused on the east. Among the precedents that Ḥājiz appears to establish is a particular dynamic between the *nāḥiya* based in Baghdad, while maintaining a relationship with a presence in Samarra which continues to represent the Hidden Imam who is believed to reside there. In one report in Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī’s *al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib*, a man is entrusted to carry the property and a petition from a woman from Dīnawar to bring it to the Imam. He meets Ḥājiz in Baghdad. However, Ḥājiz refuses to accept his money and sends him on to Samarra, where he is issued with a note from the *nāḥiya* which dispels his doubts over which is the correct recipient of the money, whether the *nāḥiya* or Ja‘far ‘the Liar.’ The note instructs him to then go back to Baghdad and pay the money to Ḥājiz.¹¹⁰ This presents an interesting interplay between Baghdad and Samarra, in which Baghdad appears to be the main location for the activities of the high-*wakīls*, but Samarra still appears to be the location where both the adherents of the Child Imam and Ja‘far are still operating. While administration may now be centered on Baghdad, activities in Samarra are maintained to supply an evidentiary function, maintaining continuity with the past and claiming a particular intimacy with the Hidden Imam.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442-3.

¹¹⁰ ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Alī ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib*, edited by Nabīl Riḍā ‘Ulwān (Qumm: Mu’assisat Anṣāriyān, 1411 AH [1990-1 CE]), 594-6. This a report in which Abū Ja‘far in Baghdad is depicted as sending money to an unnamed *wakīl* in Samarra, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 495.

This association of Ḥājiz with both Baghdad and Samarra probably represents the period before the property of the Imam was passed definitively into the hands of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, after which organizing pilgrimage and tax-collection around the house of the Imam in Samarra would have become more difficult. Given his operation in Baghdad, there is nothing to contradict an identification of Ḥājiz as a potential candidate for the representative of the Imam mentioned in the *nuwwāb* hadith.

The basic narrative suggested by the ‘pre-Envoy’ layer of narrative reports is that Ḥājiz was the preeminent *wakīl* amongst the *wakīls* of the early-Occultation Samarra wakīlate, but that his authority was highly ambivalent, contested and surrounded with doubt, and that he died relatively soon after the death of the Eleventh Imam. Nothing is known about Ḥājiz beyond the few mentions of him amongst the Occultation narratives. He does not seem to have been a scholar or a figure with distinguishing features beyond his role in the early Occultation. He does not receive a biography in any of the *Rijāl* works. His name is rather rare, and indeed, perhaps is not a proper name at all. Ibn Ḥajar has no record of the name Ḥājiz with that spelling, in his *Tabsīr al muntabih bi-taḥrīr al-mushtabih*,¹¹¹ suggesting that this was either a nickname,¹¹² a foreign word or name, or simply an error. His *nisba*, *al-washshā*’ suggests that he was a fine textile merchant, a not-uncommon calling among the prominent followers of the Imams in this period,¹¹³ and perhaps this is an indication of wealth. This would also seem to place him in the

¹¹¹ Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, *Tabsīr al muntabih bi-taḥrīr al-mushtabih* (Cairo, *Dār al-miṣrīya li-al-ta’līf wa-al-tarjama*: [1964]).

¹¹² What this nickname might refer to is obscure. The root of the word means to block, hinder, prevent, isolate or conceal. We might speculate, therefore that this name refers to his function of mediation, interposing himself between the community and the Imam, much as a vizier or a chamberlain (*ḥājib*) does. In this case however, we would not expect the word to be applied without the definite article. However, in our sources the name exists both with and without the definite article.

¹¹³ See Chapter 2.

same mercantile class as the ‘Amrīs (both were referred to by the epithet “the Oil Merchant”) from which many *wakīls* were drawn.¹¹⁴

Ḥājiz’s obscurity is, in some ways, the mirror opposite of the obscurity of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, who is represented in all the *rijāl* works and later accounts of the Safirate, but for whom early narrative accounts are almost entirely absent. In the case of Ḥājiz, on the other hand, there are various tantalizing early accounts of him leading the administration of the Occultation-era community. The gap between his stated activities and his absence from the *rijāl* literature suggest firstly that he was not a scholar or a transmitter of hadith, and secondly that he may have been an earlier, transitional figure before the rise to preeminent authority of Abū Ja‘far, one of a number of elite *wakīls* who collaborated to hold the community institutions together. As with other clusters of traditions from this period, the reports about Ḥājiz display a chronological development that tends towards the increasing acceptance of the canonical position of the ‘Amrīs as preeminent *wakīls* or Envoys and the effacement or minimization of contradictory narratives. It is hard to know precisely what role Ḥājiz played in the earliest years of the Occultation era, but our sources all depict him as a key player, as a major representative of the institutions of Imamate, holding power and influence that reached far out to the community. There is some evidence that the extent of his importance was gradually effaced in the memory of the Twelvers. Our earliest source for Ḥājiz is, as usual, Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*. Notably, it is in this earliest source that Ḥājiz’s authority appears to be greatest:

علي بن محمد ، عن الحسن بن عبد الحميد قال : شككت في أمر حاجز فجمعت شيئا ثم صرت إلى العسكر ، فخرج
إلي ليس فينا شك ولا فيمن يقوم مقامنا بأمرنا رد ما معك إلى حاجز بن يزيد

¹¹⁴ See Mushegh Asatryan, “Bankers and Politics”.

‘Alī b. Muḥammad>>>

Al-Ḥasan b. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd said: I doubted about the leadership (*amr*) of Ḥājiz, and I collected something [i.e. money for the Imam] then went to the ‘Askar (Samarra) and a rescript (*tawqī’*) was issued to me: “We have no doubt about he who stands in our place (*man qāma maqāmanā*) so, by our order, return what you have to Ḥājiz b. Yazīd.¹¹⁵

This report seems to position Ḥājiz as taking on exactly the kind of mediatory authority mentioned by the Imam in the *nuwwāb* hadith. A key fact here is the doubt expressed about Ḥājiz’s leadership which occurs in numerous reports about him. The word *amr*, meaning command, or affair, is often applied to mean the Imamate itself. The phrase “he who stands in our place (*man qāma maqāmanā*)” is sometimes used in Shi‘i literature to refer to the succession of one Imam to another, and later, to the succession of one Envoy to another.¹¹⁶ Another report in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl* uses the same phrase to refer to Ḥājiz in the context of supernatural inspiration, and suggests a relationship between Ḥājiz and the Hidden Imam in Samarra:

حدثني العاصمي أن رجلا تفكر في رجل يوصل إليه ما وجب للغريم عليه السلام وضاق به صدره ، فسمع
هاتفا يهتف به : " أوصل ما معك إلى حاجز " . قال : وخرج أبو محمد السروي إلى سر من رأى ومعه مال
فخرج إليه ابتداء " فليس فينا شك ولا فيمن يقوم مقامنا شك ورد ما معك إلى حاجز "

Al-‘Āṣimī related to me that a man kept on thinking about a man to whom he had sent what was due to the Creditor [*al-gharīm*: i.e., the Imam] and his breast contracted [in worry] and he heard a voice (*hātif*) calling to him, “Send what you have to Ḥājiz!”

[Al-‘Āṣimī] said: And Abū Muḥammad al-Sarawī went out to Samarra with money. And this was written to him (*kharaja ilayhi*) anticipating him (*ibtidā’an*): “We have no doubt,

¹¹⁵ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 521.

¹¹⁶ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:327; Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 223.

and nor does he who stands in our place (*man qāma maqāmanā*), so send what you have to Ḥājiz.”¹¹⁷

This report (or two reports), then, is an attempt to establish the authority of Ḥājiz in the Occultation period through the explicit statement of the Hidden Imam. Again, the phrase, “he who stands in our place” suggests something more than mere appointment of a functionary, but approaches a full deputization of Imamic authority, as was claimed for ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd during the Imamate of the Eleventh Imam, and later, for Abū Ja‘far as representative of the Hidden Imam.

In both of these reports, a relationship is suggested between Ḥājiz, presumably based in Baghdad, and the Imam in Samarra. This relationship is made explicit in a report which exists in a later source, *al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib* by Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Mashhadī, (d. 1164 or 1165). In this report, a woman from Dīnawar entrusts money for the Imam to a man called Aḥmad b. Abī Rawḥ, saying to him, “Oh Ibn Abī Rawḥ, you are the most reliable of those in our *nāḥiya* [i.e. the fiscal administration of Dīnawar].” He expects to take the money to Ja‘far b. ‘Alī ‘the Liar.’ Aḥmad heads first to Baghdad, where he meets Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshā’, perhaps suggesting that Ḥājiz was, at first, the representative of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ in Baghdad:

فحملت المال وخرجت حتى دخلت بغداد ، فأتيت حاجز بن يزيد الوشاء ، فسلمت عليه وجلست فقال : ألك حاجة ؟ فقلت : هذا مال دفع إلي لأدفعه إليك ، أخبرني كم هو ؟ ومن دفعه إلي ؟ فإن أخبرتني دفعته إليك . قال : لم أوامر بأخذه ، وهذه رقعة جاءتني بأمرك . فإذا فيها : " لا تقبل من أحمد بن أبي روح ، وتوجه به إلينا إلى سر من رأى " فقلت : لا إله إلا الله ، هذا أجل شيء أردته . فخرجت به ووافيت سر من رأى ، فقلت : أبدأ بجعفر ، ثم

¹¹⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498-9.

تفكرت وقلت : أبدأ بهم ، فإن كانت المحنة من عندهم وإلا مضيت إلى جعفر . فدنوت من باب دار أبي محمد

عليه السلام ، فخرج إلي خادم فقال : أنت أحمد بن أبي روح ؟ قلت : نعم ، قال : هذه الرقعة اقرأها

So I carried the money and I went out until I entered Baghdad, and I came to Hājiz b.

Yazīd al-Washshā', and I greeted him and sat, then he said, "Do you have a request (*hāja*)?"

And I said, "This money was paid to me so that I may pay it to you. Tell me how much it is, and who paid it to me, and if you inform me, then I will give it to you."

He said, "I have not been ordered to take it, and this note (*ruq'a*) came to me regarding your affair, for in it, it says: "Do not take from Aḥmad b. Abī Rawḥ, but rather send him to us in Samarra.""

So I said, "There is no God but God, this is the most glorious thing I have wished." So I went out with it, and I arrived at Samarra. And I said, "I will begin with Ja'far [the Liar]. Then I thought and I said, "I will begin with them [i.e. the *nāhiya*, or the servants of the Eleventh Imam], in case the burden is with them, and if not, I will pass on to Ja'far."

So I went down to the door of the house of Abū Muḥammad [al-'Askarī](AS), and a servant came out to me and said, ""Are you Aḥmad b. Abī Rawḥ?""

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Read this note (*ruq'a*)."¹¹⁸

In the note, the Hidden Imam writes, displaying miraculous knowledge of the circumstances in which the money was given to Aḥmad b. Abī Rawḥ. In addition, the Imam gives instructions of what to do with the wealth he carries. Amongst it are three pearls, and these he is instructed to

¹¹⁸ Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *Thāqib*, 594-5.

“give them to our slave girl so-and so (*fulāna*) for we have made a gift of them to her, and with the rest he is told, “go to Baghdad and pay the money to Ḥājiz and take from him what he gives you as your expenses (*nafaqa*) for your accommodation (*manzil*).” In addition, he is told, “And, oh Ibn Abī Rawḥ, do not return to speaking of Ja‘far.”¹¹⁹ While this account is in a relatively late source, its focus on the person of Ḥājiz, rather than the Four Envoys, suggests that it may contain some early details. The use of Samarra as a source of evidentiary miracles and Baghdad as the center of the financial administration expands and confirms what we have gleaned from Kulaynī and Ibn Bābūya. We gain valuable details about the operation of the *wikāla* network, insofar as the *wakīls* are rewarded with expenses for their pains. Crucially, there is an implicit suggestion that Ḥājiz was instrumental in first representing Ja‘far, ‘the Liar’, but then turning to the Occultation faction, and diverting the canonical taxes away from Ja‘far. This paradigm is familiar from the *wakīls* who diverted funds from Ja‘far as we have seen in Chapter 4. Here however, Ḥājiz is not being condemned for doing this as motivated by avarice, as was suggested in that case, but rather is shown to be representing the true Imam.

Nonetheless, many of the reports which mention Ḥājiz suggest that he was a figure who is surrounded by great doubt,¹²⁰ and this doubt was perhaps connected to this public flip-flopping from Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ to the Occultation faction. This doubt fits Ḥājiz neatly into the archetype of the *wakīls* who are doubted, which we have encountered above. The intensity of the perplexity caused by the doubt regarding Ḥājiz’s status suggests that he was a figure of some importance as

¹¹⁹ Mashhadī, *Thāqib* 595-6.

¹²⁰ Apart from the reports cited here, one further piece of evidence may help us understand the doubt surrounding Ḥājiz’s tenure as preeminent *wakīl*. In addition to the report mentioned above which seems to associate Ḥājiz with Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, one other report indicates the fallability of Ḥājiz, showing him forgetting to send on money destined for the Imam, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 493-4. This is a slight hint, but may indicate financial mismanagement. Of course, there was also more than enough reason to doubt provided by the very circumstances of the Occultation itself.

well as being controversial. This doubt was sufficiently troubling to the leaders of the *nāḥiya* in the early Occultation period that rescripts from the Imam were generated in support of his leadership. In a report in Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*, the doubt surrounding Ḥājiz is again emphasized, and a date is added:

محمد بن الحسن بن عبد الحميد القطاني قال : شك الحسن بن عبد الحميد في امر حجر الوشا فجمع مالا وخرج إليه الامر في سنة ستين ليس فينا شك ولا في من يقوم بأمرنا فاردد ما معك إلى حجر ابن يزيد

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qaṭṭānī¹²¹ said: al-Ḥasan b. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd [i.e. the transmitter’s father] doubted about the leadership (*amr*) of Ḥājiz¹²² al-Washshā’ so he gathered money and the order came out to him in the year 60 [i.e. 260] “There is no doubting us, nor is there doubt about he who stands at our order. So send what you have to Ḥājiz b. Yazīd.¹²³

Again, we see the use of the same kind of language as Kulaynī’s report, suggesting a formal investiture of Ḥājiz into quasi-Imamic authority, an authority which would later be recognized as characterizing the office of Envoy. The mention of the date 260/874, here, establishes the activities of Ḥājiz at the very earliest period, immediately after the death of the Eleventh Imam, and thereby associates with him the earliest phase of doubt and perplexity in the community. The doubt of the community is seen in these reports to be associated with his authority. We can see here how the mechanism of the rescript (*tawqī’*) which had been prominent in excommunicating miscreants during the Imamate of the Eleventh Imam, was put into purpose to establish the

¹²¹ This is perhaps a relation of the *wakīl* under Abū Ja‘far and Ibn Rawḥ, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ja‘far al-Qaṭṭān al-Qummī. If so, this suggests that supporters of Abū Ja‘far were allied to Ḥājiz. Thus they would have affirmed Ḥājiz’s legitimacy, as representatives of the *nāḥiya*, meanwhile his legacy was being sidelined in favor of the genealogy of Abū Ja‘far.

¹²² The text reads Ḥujr, rather than Ḥājiz, but we can see that it clearly refers to Ḥājiz, based on the similarity of this report to those in the Twelver sources, and the fact of the *nisba* al-Washshā’.

¹²³ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 278.

authority of the *nāḥiya*, in particular Ḥājiz, in the new era, prefiguring the prominent use of rescripts by Abū Ja‘far.

On the basis of these reports, we may perhaps credit Ḥājiz as having been the earliest *wakīl* to have established his authority as something like a preeminent *wakīl* appointed by the Imam, or the first among a clique of *wakīls*. He established a number of the mechanisms which later became characteristic of the office of Envoy. In particular Ḥājiz appears to establish the precedent of using Baghdad as a base for the fiscal administration, while maintaining a relationship with representatives of the Imam in Samarra; and the use of Imamic rescripts to establish the authority of the *nāḥiya* in the Occultation era. Though Ḥājiz was not ultimately canonized for posterity, perhaps due to the novelty of the position and the general perplexity of the era, or because of his subsequent death before he could cement his authority, we must acknowledge that this contribution helped establish a core of relative stability in the community, centered on the old logic of the canonical tax-collection network. The reports about Ḥājiz survive, as do many of the early evidence for diverse early claims on authority, primarily because of their utility in providing a mass of evidence to prove the existence of the Child Imam, and in spite of their apparent contradiction of the later canonical succession of Four Envoys.¹²⁴

With regards to the existence of relations between Ḥājiz and the ‘Amrīs, Kulaynī mentions nothing. However, in one of the Qummī delegation hadiths in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, we see ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, Ḥājiz and ‘Aqīd the Eunuch all present, and responding to the problematic claims of Ja‘far. Is it possible that this report contains an implicit polemic against the conduct of these figures? In this report (also cited in the previous chapter) a certain Abū al-Adyān carries letters to Madā’in on behalf of Imam al-‘Askarī, and returns to find that the Imam has died, as

¹²⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442-3.

indeed he prophesied. On seeing that Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ has claimed the Imamate, he responds despairingly that if Ja‘far is the Imam, then the Imamate is finished, and in keeping with other similar hadith, he refuses to give letters destined for the Imam to Ja‘far. In this report, neither Ḥājiz nor ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd appears in a favorable light, from the perspective of later doctrine, but Ḥājiz appears in a particularly poor light. As for Ḥājiz, when the Child Imam appears to prevent Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ from praying over the corpse of the Eleventh Imam, Ḥājiz says to Ja‘far, “Oh my lord, who is the boy so that we may set up proof against him (*li-nuqīma al-ḥujjata ‘alayhi*).”¹²⁵ Ḥājiz, then, is depicted as giving respect to Ja‘far, and even working with him to oppose the claims of the Child Imam. Does this account present a potential solution to the question of the doubt surrounding Ḥājiz? Did he perhaps compromise his role, by associating too closely with Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, and then changing his mind? The evidence is slight, there may be here a motive for the doubt associated with Ḥājiz. If this is so, then, in this report at least, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd is depicted in a very minor role. Instead, it was not ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, but ‘Aqīd the Eunuch who appears to be the closest to the Imams, announcing the shrouding of the Imam, and speaking to the Qummīs on behalf of the Child Imam as he displays his miraculous divination of the contents of the Qummīs canonical tax offering. All of this presents rather ambivalent evidence, perhaps reflecting the ambivalent opinions of the community at the time, or ambivalence in the later interpretation of the contradictory nature of the early sources. But at the very least, we may see in this report a suggestion either that Ḥājiz was compromised in his dealings with Ja‘far. If this report had been circulated during the period of ‘Amrī ascendancy, however, one would have expected this report to express a more fully pro-‘Amrī position, instead of highlighting the role of ‘Aqīd the Eunuch. Instead, we may posit the occurrence of a

¹²⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 475-6.

transitional phase in which the idea of Imamic intermediaries to the Child Imam and the payment of canonical taxes was accepted, but either the idea of a particular holder of authority was not yet established, or it was shared or contested between various *wakīls* and household insiders. This reminds us of the testimony of Abū Sahl, and indeed Nu‘mānī, who mention intermediaries to the Imam, but stop short at naming them.¹²⁶

The final stage in the growth of the tradition about Ḥājiz is that eventually he was depicted as being formally subordinate to the ‘Amrīs. This addition appears to be late, after the fourth/tenth century, as a version of the same report exists in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl* that does not include this correction of status. In Ibn Bābūya’s version of the report, set in Merv, a doubting man is advised to send the 1000 dinars that he has collected for the *nāḥiya* to Ḥājiz. The man only sends 200 dinars, however, and a rescript (*tawqī‘*) is issued, asking where the full 1000 dinars are. The rescript also responds to the man’s anxiety about directing his money safely to the *nāḥiya* by saying, “If you wish to deal with someone then deal with al-Asadī at Rayy.” In this way, Ḥājiz is replaced by al-Asadī, and this is interpreted as a miraculous prediction Ḥājiz’s death, for sure enough, Ḥājiz dies soon after, and is mourned by the protagonists of the narrative. The mourning is curtailed by the realization that this was a sign: the demonstration of the miraculous foreknowledge of Ḥājiz’s death date is understood as an evidentiary miracle establishing the religious legitimacy of whoever is representing the Imam through the *nāḥiya*.¹²⁷ This report is repeated in all of its main points in a Sixth/Twelfth century work of Qutb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā‘ij wa-al-jarā‘ih*, but with the insertion of a passage of dialogue in which the subordination of Ḥājiz to the ‘Amrīs is made clear:

¹²⁶ Nu‘mānī, *Ghayba*, 164; 178-9.

¹²⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 488.

فقال : عندي مال للغريم فأيش تأمرني ؟ فقلت : وجهه إلى حاجز. فقال لي : فوق حاجز أحد ؟ فقلت : نعم ،

الشيخ

He said, “I have money for the Creditor (*al-gharīm*), so what do you order me to do?”

I said, “Send it to Ḥājiz.”

He said to me, “Is there anyone above Ḥājiz?” And I said, “Yes, the Shaykh.”¹²⁸

This mention of ‘the Shaykh’ is, in the context, clearly a reference either to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī or to Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, who are both often so named in Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba*. Is this a record of a historical of subordination? It is unlikely, given that this subordinate relationship does not appear in the earliest sources. Indeed, the role of Ḥājiz in the *nāḥiya* reports in Kulaynī’s *Kāfi* is greater than that of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī and his father, who are mentioned only in the *thiqa* hadith. Instead, the subordination of Ḥājiz to al-‘Amrī is consonant with a tendency towards the doctrinal correction of reports to harmonize with the canonization of the Four Envoys first fully formulated in Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba*. In addition, while Ḥājiz died soon after the Eleventh Imam, thus identifying him potentially as an old man with long service as a *wakīl*, Abū Ja‘far died many years later, in 305/917. Assuming Abū Ja‘far was around 70 when he died, he would have been in his late twenties upon the death of the Eleventh Imam in 260/874, which would have suggested an automatic subordination to Ḥājiz, who was likely to have been older and therefore more venerable.

Finally, the doubt surrounding Ḥājiz’s authority was cut short by his death, and as mentioned above, a rescript was issued in the name of the Imam saying, “If you wish to deal with someone then deal with al-Asadī at Rayy.” This appears to be a kind of succession statement, but

¹²⁸ Qutb al-dīn al-Rāwandī, *Al-Kharā’ij wa al-jarā’ih* (Qumm: Mu’assasat al-imām al-mahdī. 1409 AH [1988-9]), 2: 295-6.

it is peculiar, because if Ḥājiz was based in Baghdad, then why would he be succeeded by someone based in Rayy? Hussain sees this as evidence of an administrative reshuffle, in which an additional layer of hierarchy was inserted so that the Shi'a in the east would have to communicate with a local representative in Rayy, who was himself in touch with the Envoy of the Imam in Baghdad.¹²⁹ This argument, however, is based on Hussain's overall framework predicated upon the assumption that the canonical succession of Four Envoys was historical, and that any *wakīls* who operated under the tenure of a particular Envoy must have been subordinated to him. As we have seen, however, 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd does not appear to have been active after the death of the Eleventh Imam, and Ḥājiz's authority appears to have preceded that of Abū Ja'far, which would throw into doubt Hussain's model of an administrative reshuffle. Instead we might posit that Ḥājiz's death was followed by an organic devolution of authority from the center towards the local communities which had rejected Ja'far. This would be a further step in the desire of the local communities in Qumm and the *Jibāl* area of northern Iran (centered upon Rayy) to figure out how to maintain the institutional continuity in their collection and donation of canonical taxes, a desire also manifested in the delegation reports. Rather than the formal erection of a hierarchy that Jassim Hussain envisages, instead, the death of Ḥājiz was one step closer to the rupture in the leadership of the old guard. It is unfortunate that we cannot date the death of Ḥājiz, but the consternation suggested in the report that mentions his death perhaps indicate that he was Abū Sahl's "one man" who survived the rest of the old guard. If this were the case, then the death of Ḥājiz would indeed have been a distressing moment. The report about the appointment of al-Asadī after Ḥājiz, then, may give us evidence for a developing axis of power between Baghdad and Qumm/ Rayy upon which the new Twelver community was to be

¹²⁹ Hussain, *Occultation*, 124.

founded, and which the Qummī delegation reports have also suggested to us. Al-Asadī, as well as succeeding to the authority of Ḥājiz in the east, appears in our sources as deeply involved with the project to legitimate the authority of Abū Ja‘far, along with the *wakīl* al-Qaṭṭān, and we will address their role when we come to discuss the career of Abū Ja‘far in Chapter 7.

5.13 Al-Asadī as Ḥājiz’s successor

If we identify Ḥājiz as the major *wakīl* of the early *nāḥiya*, then the question of the nomination of al-Asadī as his successor has to be taken seriously. The first question we should address is whether or not al-Asadī belonged to the old guard. This question can be answered fairly easily with reference to the *Rijāl* literature. As a scholar with authored books, he is relatively well-known and easy to identify in the *Rijāl* works. He is clearly part of the younger generation: ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī gives his death date as 312/924-5¹³⁰ Ṭūsī, in his *Rijāl*, includes him among those who did not transmit from any Imam, again corroborating the idea that he was an Occultation-era figure, rather than part of the old guard of companions of al-‘Askarī. Interestingly enough, Ṭūsī also refers to him as “one of the *bābs*.”¹³¹ As noted above, in Chapter 2, there is an Asadī listed for Rayy in Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list among the *wakīls* who saw the Hidden Imam, though we have no report preserved that he did so. Nonetheless, the phrase that he was “one of the *bābs*” might suggest that he did indeed claim such direct mediation, but that Twelver reporters did not choose to preserve reports regarding this role as the leadership of Abū Ja‘far coalesced.

As we have seen, al-Asadī was nominated as *wakīl* to succeed Ḥājiz. It is unclear exactly what this means. Jassim Hussain posits this as referring to a restructuring of the hierarchy of the

¹³⁰ Al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. al-Muṭahhar, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl fī ma‘rifat al-rijāl*, edited by Jawād al-Qayyūmī ([Qumm?]: Mu‘assasat al-nashr al-islāmī, 1417 [1997]), 435.

¹³¹ Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 439.

wakīlate.¹³² However, as the testimony of Abū Sahl’s *Tanbīh* suggests, al-Asadī, though not part of the old guard, must have been nominated before Ḥājiz died, and therefore before Abū Ja‘far (who was also not one of the old guard) rose to authority. This suggests that rather than the ‘Amrīs restructuring the hierarchy of the wakīlate, in effect the wakīlate was beheaded by the death of the old guard, and a more peripheral figure like al-Asadī was left to fend for himself.

We know that al-Asadī was one of the younger generation of *wakīls*, rather than the old guard, for his death date is given by Ṭūsī as 312/924-5¹³³ The same report, transmitted by Muḥammad b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī states that “al-Asadī died in evident probity (*‘adāla*), never changing, with no one accusing him.” According to Najāshī, he authored a book called *Kitāb al-radd ‘alā ahl-al-istiṭā‘a*,¹³⁴ its title suggesting it might have been an anti-Mu‘tazila tract. Though al-Ṭūsī does not name him as an Envoy in his *Ghayba*, instead placing him in the subordinate category of “trustworthy people to whom the rescripts were given by those appointed to the Envoyship (*sifāra*).” However, there is no sign of this kind of subordination in the earlier strata of reports, suggesting that it is a later rationalization of the confusing plurality of actors in the early Occultation period, thereby shoring up the canonical position of Abū Ja‘far and Ibn Rawḥ as Envoys. Intriguingly, however, though Ṭūsī makes this distinction in his *Ghayba*, in his *Rijāl*, he states plainly that al-Asadī “was one of the *bābs*.”¹³⁵ This is mysterious. The Envoys were, of course, sometimes referred to as *bābs*, and the term is also used to refer to a number of charismatic and gnostic leaders who were often seen as in opposition to the Envoys. It is strange that Ṭūsī should include this statement of the spiritual authority of al-Asadī, while he seems to

¹³² Hussain, *Occultation*, 124.

¹³³ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 260-1.

¹³⁴ Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 230-231.

¹³⁵ Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 439.

contradict it in *Ghayba*. This may suggest a flexibility in the usage of the term *bāb*, or else that Ṭūsī's *Rijāl* may, in some cases, be more a faithful compilation of earlier reports than a reflection of his own positions. Another mysterious reference is the claim that he “told stories”,¹³⁶ and the reference in Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥalabī's, *Rijāl*, that “he was reliable (*thiqa*), sound in hadith (*ṣaḥīḥ*), except that there was an accusation (*taʿn*) which necessitated his mention among the weak transmitters (*duʿafāʾ*).”¹³⁷ One might perhaps speculate that this accusation might be in some way connected with Ṭūsī's mention of him as “one of the *bābs*”, or else it may be related to his transmission of reports from an early period of generation of numerous responses to the Occultation era which were later weeded out as the canonical narrative crystallized.

Our evaluation of the role of al-Asadī is greatly aided by the fact that we do have some dates attached to his name. In addition to the fact of his death in 312/924-5, we also have a report that clearly dates his activities as a *wakīl* to the year 290/303, perhaps also referring to the perplexity following the death of Ḥājiz:

أخبرنا أبو الحسين بن أبي جيد القمي ، عن محمد بن الحسن بن الوليد ، عن محمد بن يحيى العطار ، عن محمد بن أحمد بن يحيى ، عن صالح بن أبي صالح قال : سألتني بعض الناس في سنة تسعين ومائتين قبض شيء ، فامتنعت " من ذلك وكتبت أستطلع الرأي ، فأتاني الجواب : " بالري محمد بن جعفر العربي فليدفع إليه فإنه من ثقافتنا

Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Abī Jayyid al-Qummī

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd

Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-ʿAtṭār

Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā

¹³⁶ Al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl*, 435.

¹³⁷ Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥillī, *Rijāl* (Najaf: al-Maṭbaʿa al-ḥaydariyya, 1392/1972), 167-8.

Şālih b. Abī Şālih said: A certain person asked me in the year 290[903], to take hold of something and I refrained from that. I wrote in consultation, and the reply came back to me, “At Rayy there is Muḥammad b. Ja‘far the Arab [al-Asadī], so let him pay him, for he is one of our reliable ones (*thiqāt*).”¹³⁸

This, then, shows that al-Asadī was indeed ‘one of the trustworthy ones’ (*thiqa*) of the Imam, and was operating in 290/903 at the time when Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī wrote his *Tanbīh*, claiming that all the old guard have died and all correspondence with the Imam has been cut off. This places al-Asadī again firmly among the younger generation. This report is strongly reminiscent of the reports we have quoted above regarding the consternation at the death of Ḥājiz which was followed by the designation of al-Asadī to the succession. Again, the narrator, Şālih appears to doubt whether he should carry money or not, and needs to write first to gain certainty. In combination, these two reports suggest that al-Asadī was recognized as a key *wakīl* at the time of Ḥājiz’s death, and that this took place around 290/903. This strongly suggests that Ḥājiz may have been the “one man” surviving the old guard, mentioned by Abū Sahl, and that with the succession of al-Asadī to his authority, there ensued the era of the ‘hidden *wakīl*’ before Abū Ja‘far could establish his own authority and reestablish the idea of Envoy, employing the basic mechanisms established by Ḥājiz after his defection from Ja‘far ‘the Liar.’

5.14 Al-Asadī as part of the Occultation faction

A certain al-Asadī’s name also appears on Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list of the *wakīls* who saw the Imam. Was this al-Asadī any relation of Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Asadī who succeeded Ḥājiz? This would seem to make sense, given that he is listed as a *bāb* by Ṭūsī. However, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī actually appears on the *isnād* of Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list, as

¹³⁸ Tusi, *Ghayba*, 260.

does his son, Abū ‘Alī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī. This suggest there is a strong family motivation to pass down Occultation lore. The Asadī on Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list is listed as the *wakīl* for Rayy, which would suggest it should either be Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī (though it would seem odd that Abū al-Ḥusayn would rely on the authority of Muḥammad al- Kūfī to transmit his own interaction with the Hidden Imam), or his father, or some close relation who was also a *wakīl*. However, I have found no reports that depict Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī seeing the Hidden Imam himself, and as a member of the younger generation, he was operating in the period when Abū Sahl claims communications had been cut off. At any rate, his transmission of the report places him firmly among the Occultation faction. If al-Asadī did claim to have seen the Hidden Imam, it is unusual that the report would not be preserved. Instead, it is likely that the Asadī from Rayy on the list was an ancestor whose communication with the Hidden Imam was elaborated by later generations to underscore their family’s status within the Occultation faction.

5.15 Where are the Kufans?

In the new era, then, the *nāḥiya* which held together the institutions of the Imamate was to be based in Baghdad, after abortive attempts to establish continuity based on the Imam’s house in Samarra, and the delegates from Qumm and the Jibāl formed an alliance with this Baghdadi clique. Many of the other narratives regarding recognition of the Hidden Imam and/or his representatives involve people coming from the east. Where, in all of this, are the people of Kufa? Kufa had traditionally been the center of power and support for Shi‘i Imams going back to the time of ‘Alī. However, traditions regarding Kufan support for the Hidden Imam and the *nāḥiya* at this time are distinctly thin on the ground. Ibn Bābūya scarcely mentions Kufa in his chapter on those who saw the Imam. In spite of the *nisba* of the transmitter, Muḥammad al-

Kūfi's list of *wakīls* and laymen who saw the Hidden Imam is distinctly short on Kufans.¹³⁹ If we compare our sources for references to Kufa, neither Kulaynī,¹⁴⁰ Ibn Bābūya nor Ṭūsī mention anything to speak of regarding the activities of Kufans in the early Occultation period. Khaṣībī, on the other hand has significantly more references to Kufans, which is unsurprising, given that we know that he had some supporters in Kufa.¹⁴¹ As we have seen, many of these relate to Kufans supporting Ja'far 'the Liar', but we also have references to supporters of the Hidden Imam hailing from Kufa and the Sawād.¹⁴² On the other hand, Khaṣībī also carries many references to Qummīs as active in connection with belief in the Hidden Imam, suggesting that there was indeed an important involvement of Qummīs in the new Twelver identity. All of this suggests that if we want to understand the drop in Kufan involvement in the early stages of Twelver identity, we should look to Khaṣībī, and in particular, in the story of the failure of Ja'far which looms large in Khaṣībī's account. One possible answer is that the Kufans, unlike the Qummīs, were more deeply implicated in allegiance to Ja'far 'the Liar.' As we have seen in the previous chapter, Ja'far 'the Liar' was certainly supported by Kufans, including those among the *faḥḥiyya* who pledged their allegiance to him; the followers of Fāris b. Ḥātim. If we assume that a large number of Kufans followed Ja'far 'the Liar', this would suggest that they would be particularly severely affected by the era of perplexity once Ja'far was ultimately rejected.

In addition, the activities of the Ismaili mission began to gain a following in and around Kufa, where Ḥamdān b. Qarmaṭ converted and engaged in the *da'wa* around 264/877-8.¹⁴³ One

¹³⁹ He lists al-ʿĀṣimī as the only *wakīl* for Kufa who saw the Imam, and he mentions no laymen from Kufa, in clear contrast with the larger numbers from Baghdad, Qumm and Rayy. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 442-3.

¹⁴⁰ Kulaynī carries a single report which seems to cast aspersions on Kufa as a place where excessive alcohol consumption takes place. *Kāfi*, 1:523.

¹⁴¹ Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 9, 17, 20.

¹⁴² Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 246-8, 255-6, 394-5.

¹⁴³ See Wilferd Madelung, "Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ," *EI2*.

compelling narrative of Kufan conversion to the Ismaili *da'wa* provides us with a graphic description of the success of Ismaili claims during the perplexity of the early Occultation-era Imamis. The head of the early Fatimid *da'wa* in Yemen was Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Farah b. Ḥawshab b. Zādān al-Kūfī, known as al-Manṣūr or Manṣūr al-Yaman. Al-Qāḍī Nu'mān's *Iftitāḥ al-da'wa* includes a narrative of his conversion to the Ismaili *da'wa*:

The origin of Abū al-Qāsim, head of the mission in the Yemen, according to what men of knowledge and trust from among his associates have informed us, is that he was an inhabitant of al-Kūfa from a learned Shi'ī family. He had read the Qur'ān and implemented it (*qawwamahu*). He had studied traditions (*ḥadīth*) and religious sciences (*fiqh*). He was among the adherents of Twelver Imami Shi'ism who follow Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Mūsā b. Ja'far b. Muḥammad. They believed that he was the Mahdī, who would become manifest, and that it would come to pass what is related about him in traditions reported from the Prophet, may God's blessings be upon him. They falsely attributed that [status] to him and adopted him as a protector. However, they did not see him, so they alleged that he had hidden himself from them. Then that became void among them. There are lengthy stories about him and amazing nonsense.

... So I went out to the Euphrates, or the Tigris. As I was walking on [the bank of] the river, it was time for prayer. I performed ablution and prayed, and sat reflecting upon my situation. Then I began reciting the Qur'ān. I started with the Sūrat al-Kahf. While I was reciting it, suddenly an old man, accompanied by another man, approached me. And by

God, never before had my eyes gazed upon anyone who filled my heart with greater reverence than that old man.¹⁴⁴

The old man turns out to be the Ismaili Imam, who gradually guides Manṣūr al-Yaman, to the point where he can be initiated into the *da'wa*. While this is a single narrative¹⁴⁵ it is highly suggestive of the kind of narratives available to many of the Shi'ī Imamis struggling with perplexity of the era towards the end of the third/ninth century.

5.16 Ibn Mahziyār of Ahwāz, the doubting *wakīl*

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār of Ahwāz plays an important role in the Twelver sources. Reports in our sources about Ibn Mahziyār contain two main elements: he is mentioned as succeeding to his father and being initiated into the protocols of *wakīlate* by his father on his deathbed; and he appears as a doubting *wakīl* whose doubts about the Occultation and the *nāḥiya* were eventually vanquished by Imamic intervention. Our reports include two rescripts regarding Muḥammad b. Mahziyār, and these provide us with valuable documents for understanding the early strategies of the early *wakīls*, and later Abū Ja'far, in their attempts to police doctrine and community identity after the death of the Eleventh Imam.

In contrast to both Ḥājiz and 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār is well-attested in the biographical sources, with a well-known family, including a famous uncle and a well-known father. According to the biographical dictionaries, Muḥammad b. Mahziyār's uncle, 'Alī b. Mahziyār was a Christian who converted to Islam, and became a highly regarded follower to the Imams from Riḍā until Hādī, and became the *wakīl* for Ahwāz. 'Alī b. Mahziyār transmitted many hadīth, and authored many books of law and doctrine. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār

¹⁴⁴ Qāḍī Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, translation, 21-23.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd carries a report in which a man with the *nisba* 'al-hamānī' mentions "a great man of the jurists (*fuqahā'*) of our people" who had converted to become a Qarmaṭī. *Irshād*, 2: 359.

was the brother of ‘Alī, and transmitted his books.¹⁴⁶ Muḥammad was the son of Ibrāhīm, and is mentioned among the *rijāl* of the Eleventh Imam, ‘Askarī, though not receiving the status of reliable (*thiqa*) or sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) in Ṭūsī’s *Rijāl*, as other members of his family do, presumably because of his moment of doubt.¹⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the pedigree conferred upon Muḥammad b. Mahziyār by his well-known family suggests that he would have been in a good position to exert his influence in the Occultation era. Sure enough, the reports about Ibn Mahziyār indicate the expectation of a hereditary succession to the wakīlate, and an anxiety about his supporting the Occultation faction.

When Ibrāhīm died, Muḥammad b. Mahziyār became the *wakīl* after him, and a number of different reports center upon the pivotal moment of his inheriting the wakīlate from his father, Ibrāhīm. Kashshī depicts this moment as follows:

حدثني إسحاق بن محمد البصري، قال حدثني محمد بن إبراهيم بن مهزيار قال، إن أبي لما حضرته الوفاة دفع إلي مالا و أعطاني علامة، و لم يعلم بتلك العلامة أحد إلا الله عز و جل، وقال من أتاك بهذه العلامة فادفع إليه المال قال، فخرجت إلى بغداد و نزلت في خان، فلما كان اليوم الثاني إذ جاء شيخ و دق الباب، فقلت للغلام انظر من هذا فقال شيخ بالباب، فقلت ادخل فدخل و جلس، فقال أنا العمري، هات المال الذي عندك و هو كذا و كذا و معه العلامة قال، فدفعت إليه المال. و حفص بن عمرو كان وكيل أبي محمد (ع)، و أما أبو جعفر محمد بن حفص بن عمرو فهو ابن العمري و كان وكيل الناحية، و كان الأمر يدور عليه

Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Kulthūm al-Sarakhsī>>>

Ishāq b. Muḥammad al-Baṣrī>>>

¹⁴⁶ Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 253-4. Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 388. Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 152.

¹⁴⁷ Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 402.

Muḥammad Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār said: “My father, when death attended him, paid money to me, and gave me a sign. And no one knew that sign except almighty God (AJ) and he said, “Whoever produces this sign, then pay the money to him.”

Muḥammad Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār said: So I went out to Baghdad and I stayed in a caravanserai, and on the second day, sure enough, an old man (*shaykh*) came and knocked on the door, and I said to the servant boy, “See who it is.”

[The servant boy] said, “There is an old man at the door.”

I said, “Enter!”

So he entered and sat down and he said, “I am al-‘Amrī, hand over the money which is with you, and it is such-and-such an amount,” and he had the sign.

He said: So I paid the money to him.

And Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr was a *wakīl* for Abū Muḥammad al-‘Askarī (AS), and as for Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr, he was the son of al-‘Amrī, and he was the *wakīl* of the *nāḥiya* and the leadership of the community (*amr*) revolved around him.¹⁴⁸

This narrative, then, is a familiar tale of the miraculous proof of the legitimacy of the Imam, and more particularly of the legitimacy of his *wakīls* operating in the larger sacred economy of the Imamate. The sign given to the younger Ibn Mahziyār upon his father’s death also hints again at a set of secret, regularized protocols for interaction between members of the *wikāla* network. It is also interesting to note the automatic transmission of the *wakīlate* from father to son: Muḥammad b. Mahziyār’s position as *wakīl* was hereditary. The elder Ibn Mahziyār designated the younger without reference to the Imam or the *nāḥiya*. This gives us a sense of the autonomous functioning of *wakīlate* which could be appointed by the Imam, but often probably

¹⁴⁸ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 377.

was settled by the local communities, and there must have been an expectation of this kind of continuous functioning at the local level. Through this narrative, the Ibn Mahziyār are depicted as having been bound to the ‘Amrīs, who are depicted as the central figures of the Imamic establishment, to whom canonical taxes should be carried. There is no mention of the younger Ibn Mahziyār’s famous doubt here, but merely a process of initiation into the protocols of bringing money to the *nāḥiya*. While similar stories tend to highlight the miraculous nature of these protocols, this narrative merely revolves around producing the correct sign, which does not emphasize the miraculous as much as more elaborate accounts, suggesting it may be an early version of this narrative.

To fully understand the role of Ibn Mahziyār, and his interaction with the early *nāḥiya*, we would ideally be able to determine whether his accession to the role of *wakīl* took place before or after the death of the Eleventh Imam in 260/874. Unfortunately, the evidence from our sources does not allow us to clearly judge this. In Kashshī’s report, there is no mention of the death of the Eleventh Imam. Though the narrative does not explicitly state the identity of which ‘Amrī is involved, the explanatory note added to the end of the report refers to Abū Ja‘far as “the son of al-‘Amrī”, suggesting that we must identify the “al-‘Amrī” in the narrative as the elder ‘Amrī, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd.¹⁴⁹ Given that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd is not depicted in the early sources as collecting money or acting as a *wakīl* during the Occultation era, we would naturally be led to surmise that this takes place before the Occultation era, and that Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār, the father, therefore died before the Eleventh Imam. However, Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār is depicted in another report as surviving *after* the death of the Eleventh Imam, though this report appears particularly

¹⁴⁹ Note that, even though the name of the elder ‘Amrī *wakīl* here is Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr, rather than ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, it seems reasonable to identify him as the same figure as ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, playing a key role in the *nāḥiya*.

mythic in its register, throwing doubt on its utility as a source for dating.¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, we must be open to the possibility that Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār died either before the Occultation era or during it.

It is the younger Ibn Mahziyār who plays a significant role in the Occultation era literature as a ‘doubting *wakīl*’. In the new era of perplexity, Muḥammad b. Mahziyār was to become deeply discontented by the actions of his fellow *wakīls*. Though Kashshī makes no mention of his doubting, in a couple of reports, the story about Ibn Mahziyār’s succession as *wakīl* after his father, Ibrāhīm, is directly associated with the question of the existence of the Hidden Imam after al-‘Askarī.¹⁵¹

In addition to the succession narratives, Ibn Mahziyār appears in a distinctive report which deals with the question of his doubt. One report quoted by Ibn Bābūya in his *Kamāl*, belongs to the group of reports referring to Ibn Mahziyār’s succession to his father. In this case a rescript from the Twelfth Imam is issued to Ibn Mahziyār that gives him instructions about how to answer the doubts of his flock back in Ahwāz, the area for which he was the *wakīl*:

حدثنا محمد بن الحسن رضي الله عنه ، عن سعد بن عبد الله ، عن علي بن محمد الرازي المعروف بعلان الكليني قال : حدثني محمد بن جبرئيل الأهوازي ، عن إبراهيم ومحمد ابني الفرج ، عن محمد بن إبراهيم بن مهزيار أنه ورد العراق شاكا مرتادا ، فخرج إليه " قل للمهزياري قد فهمنا ما حكيتك عن مولينا بناحيثكم فقل لهم : أما سمعتم الله عز وجل يقول : " يا أيها الذين آمنوا أطيعوا الله وأطيعوا الرسول وأولي الأمر منكم " هل أمر إلا بما هو كائن إلى يوم القيامة ، أو لم تروا أن الله عز وجل جعل لكم معاقل تأوون إليها وأعلاما تهتدون بها من لدن آدم عليه

¹⁵⁰ The report is elaborate and miraculous, with a self-consciously literary style, including the use of rhymed prose, which sets it apart from the majority of shorter, more telegraphic early Occultation reports. In this report, Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār not only survives the Eleventh Imam, but goes in search of the Twelfth Imam and meets him at his hideout in an encampment near Tā’if. It is also remarkable that it refers to two sons of al-‘Askarī, one called Mūsā, the other called M-Ḥ-M-D. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 445-53.

¹⁵¹ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 518; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276-7.

السلام إلى أن ظهر الماضي (أبو محمد) صلوات الله عليه ، كلما غاب علم بدا علم ، وإذا أفل نجم طلع نجم ، فلما قبضه الله إليه ظننتم أن الله عز وجل قد قطع السبب بينه وبين خلقه كلا ما كان ذلك ولا يكون حتى تقوم الساعة ويظهر أمر الله عز وجل وهم كارهون . يا محمد بن إبراهيم لا يدخلك الشك فيما قدمت له فإن الله عز وجل لا يخلي الأرض من حجة

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan [b. Aḥmad b. al-Walīd] (RAA)>>>

Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qummī>>>

‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Rāzī known as ‘Allān al-Kulaynī>>>

Muḥammad b. Jibrā‘il al-Ahwāzī>>>

Ibrāhīm [b. al-faraj] and Muḥammad b. al-Faraj>>>

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār [said] that he arrived in Iraq doubting and seeking (*murtād*), and [the Imam] issued a rescript (*tawqī‘*) to him:

“Say to al-Mahziyārī:

We have understood what you said about our followers (*mawālī*) in your jurisdiction (*bināhiyatikum*).

So say to them, “Have you not heard God (AJ) say, “Oh whosoever believes, obey God and obey the Prophet, and obey the bearers of authority amongst you!” [Q 4:59]

Did He make a judgement unless it should last until the Day of Judgement? And do you all not see that God (AJ) set up strongholds (*ma‘āqil*) to whom you can have refuge, and signs by which you may be guided, from Adam (AS), until the deceased [al-‘Askarī]¹⁵² appeared (SAA). Every time that a sign disappeared, another sign appeared, and if a star set, another star rose. But when God seized him to himself, you all thought that God had cut the connection (*sabab*) between him and his people. No, indeed! That was not the

¹⁵² Here the editor, Ghaffārī adds “[Abū Muḥammad]”.

case, and will not be so until the Hour arrives, and God’s command manifests itself, albeit they are unwilling.

Oh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm! Let doubt not enter you regarding what you did before, for indeed God (AJ) does not empty the earth of a Proof (*ḥujja*).¹⁵³

Here, then, Ibn Mahziyār’s doubts about the identity of the Imam are implicated in his role as the intermediary between the Imamate and the people of Ahwāz, has his father had been before him. Given the kind of response issued in the rescript, it appears that Ibn Mahziyār and his flock in Ahwāz were all perplexed about the Occultation, about the very existence of an Imam in this era, and that Ibn Mahziyār did not have the conviction himself to quiet their doubts. Thus, the rescript responds to these doubts by asserting the classic Imami doctrine that God’s Proof, in the form of an Imam, never vacates the earth. This doctrinal argument is accompanied by the practical proof of the legitimacy of the *nāḥiya*, adducing proofs drawn from the vocabulary of the protocols of the fiscal network of the *wakīls* of which his father was a member:

أليس قال لك أبوك قبل وفاته : أحضر الساعة من يعير هذه الدنانير التي عندي : فلما أبطئ ذلك عليه وخاف
الشيخ على نفسه الوحا قال لك : عيرها على نفسك وأخرج إليك كيسا كبيرا وعندك بالحضرة ثلاثة أكياس وصرة
فيها دنانير مختلفة النقد فعييرتها وختم الشيخ بخاتمة وقال لك : اختم مع خاتمي ، فإن أعش فأنا أحق بها ، وإن
أمت فاتق الله في نفسك وأولا ثم في ، فخلصني وكن عند ظني بك . أخرج رحمك الله الدنانير التي استفضلتها من
بين النقدين من حسابنا وهي بضعة عشر دينارا واسترد من قبلك فإن الزمان أصعب مما كان ، وحسبنا الله ونعم
الوكيل

Did your father not say to you before his death: “Get ready for the hour [when] someone will assay these dinars which I have”? And when [the life] became slow upon him, and

¹⁵³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 486-7.

the old man feared death was hastening, he said to you “Measure them for yourself and get a big bag out for yourself. You have in your possession three bags and a purse in which are dinars of different coin (*naqd*).” So you measured them out and the old man used to stamp them with a seal (*khātima*) and he said to you, "Stamp with my seal and if I live, then I have most right to them, and if I die, then fear God for yourself first, then for me. Then put me to rest and think of me (*fa-ḵhalliṣnī wa-kun ‘inda ḡannī bi-ka*). Take out (God have mercy on you) the dinars which you have remaining from amongst the two coinages (*naqdayn*) from our account -- that is ten-or-so dinars (*biḡ‘ata ‘ashara dinaran*) and claim back something for yourself for the time is harder than it was.” And God suffices for us, and He is the best of guardians.”¹⁵⁴

The proof cited by the Imam in this rescript to Ibn Mahziyār suggests that the rescript was generated in awareness of the stories about the elder Ibn Mahziyār’s initiation of the younger Ibn Mahziyār on his deathbed. This suggests that there was some kernel of common knowledge about Ibn Mahziyār’s succession to the wakīlate of his father that became the basis for all of these reports. It is hard to say if one of these reports was generated upon the basis of another, or if they were both based upon a common archetype. It suggests, at the least, that there two basic story elements circulating which were combined in different ways: one regarding Ibn Mahziyār’s moment of succession; and the other regarding the *nāḥiya*’s demonstration to the younger Ibn Mahziyār that it was the correct recipient of the money left in the hands of his father. If this rescript does reflect a historical communication sent from the *nāḥiya* to Ibn Mahziyār, then it shows that the logic of the sacred economy of the fiscal agents was at the heart of attempts to win him over to the cause of the *nāḥiya*.

¹⁵⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 487.

The narrative continues following this rescript, as Ibn Mahziyār provides a first-person account of his meeting with a woman appearing to represent the *nāḥiya*.

قال محمد بن إبراهيم : وقدمت العسكر زائرا فقصدت الناحية فلقيتني امرأة وقالت : أنت محمد بن إبراهيم ؟
فقلت : نعم ، فقالت لي : انصرف فإنك لا تصل في هذا الوقت و ارجع الليلة فإن الباب مفتوح لك فادخل الدار
واقصد البيت الذي فيه السراج ، ففعلت وقصدت الباب فإذا هو مفتوح فدخلت الدار وقصدت البيت الذي
وصفته فيينا أنا بين القبرين أنتحب وأبكي إذ سمعت صوتا وهو يقول : يا محمد اتق الله وتب من كل ما أنت
. عليه فقد قلدت أمرا عظيما .

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm said: “I came to al-‘Askar on pilgrimage [*zā`iran*] and I headed for the *nāḥiya*. And a woman met me and said, “Are you Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm?”

And I said, “Yes.”

And she said to me, “Turn back, for you will not make contact at this time, but come back tonight, and the gate will be open to you, then enter the house and head for the room in which is the lamp.”

So I did that, and I headed for the door, and sure enough, it was open and I entered the house and I headed for the room which she had described, and then suddenly I was between the two tombs, weeping and crying, and lo! I heard a voice saying “Oh Muḥammad, fear God! And repent what you were about, for you have been invested with great authority (*qullidta amran ‘aẓīman*)”.¹⁵⁵

This account is in keeping with other early Occultation era accounts in which the Shi‘a attempt to reach the Imam in Samarra. The atmosphere suggested by the secretive nighttime visit to the house is suggestive of the account in the *Dalā`il* in which the *wakīl* meets with his visitor in

¹⁵⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 487.

secret, in a separate house. The fact that it is a woman of the household of the Imam who acts as intermediary for the Imam is an interesting fact suggestive of the narratives mentioned in Chapter 4 in which the womenfolk of the Imam play an important part. Also, it is significant that Ibn Mahziyār encounters the Imam in the form of a voice (at least we presume this is the Imam, though it is left implicit in the narrative). The fact that this experience of contact with the Imam occurred in the house of the Imams in Samarra, between the tombs of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams suggests it depicts an early stage in the Occultation era, before Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ took possession of the house, probably, therefore between 260/874 and 262/876. The chain of transmission goes through Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh who died in 299-301/911-14, before Abū Ja‘far. Notably, there is no mention of the ‘Amrīs here. The early *nāḥiya* in the Ibn Mahziyār reports is depicted as an anonymous organ, guarding a miraculously self-manifesting Imam.

Other reports which mention the doubt of Ibn Mahziyār also place it in the earliest phase of the Occultation era. Thus, for example, in a report quoted by Khaṣībī states, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār¹⁵⁶ says, “I doubted after the death of Abū Muḥammad.”¹⁵⁷ In another report, quoted in Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*, when the death of his father leaves him with “a great deal of money” due to the Imam, Ibn Mahziyār says to himself,

لم يكن أبي ليوصي بشئ غير صحيح أحمل هذا المال إلى العراق وأكثرني دارا على الشط ولا أخبر أحدا بشئ وإن
وضح لي شئ كوضوحه [في] أيام أبي محمد عليه السلام أنفذته وإلا قصفت به.

Father was only correct to designate me as his successor. I will carry this money to Iraq and hire a house on the shore and not tell anyone anything and if something becomes

¹⁵⁶ In fact, it reads Mahdiyār, but this is clearly an error, as this figure is clearly recognizable as Ibn Mahziyār.

¹⁵⁷ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276-7.

clear to me like the clarity in the days of Abū Muḥammad, then I will send it, and if not, I will lead a life of opulence¹⁵⁸ with it.¹⁵⁹

Again, this appears to fit in with tropes of the earliest phase of the Occultation, such as the Qummi delegation hadiths, which show the *wakīls* arriving in Iraq soon after the death of ‘Askarī, and looking for a suitable recipient for the canonical taxes.

In none of these reports is there any explicit mention of Abū Ja‘far, all of which leads us to conclude that they refer to the earliest phase of the Occultation era before the rise of Abū Ja‘far. If we accept the narrative suggested in these reports, it seems that the doubt of Ibn Mahziyār emerged at an early stage following the death of the Eleventh Imam, but was quieted when Ibn Mahziyār made contact with the *nāḥiya* in Samarra, which provided proof of contact with the Imam. This proof appears to have been connected with the protocols of fiscal agents of the *wikāla* network which were passed down to Ibn Mahziyār from his father, and thus may represent some kind of initiation into the secret protocols of the network.

Although the doubt of Ibn Mahziyār can be placed in the earliest phase of the Occultation era, it appears to have had a longevity, or at least an ongoing influence into the era of Abū Ja‘far, for Abū Ja‘far issues a rescript from the Hidden Imam that addresses the doubt of Ibn Mahziyār and claims God will remove doubt from it. This rescript, which we will address in greater detail in Chapter 7, suggests that Ibn Mahziyār’s doubt may still have been alive at the turn of the fourth/tenth century, during the tenure of Abū Ja‘far. However, as we have seen, the reports which narrate Ibn Mahziyār’s conversion from doubt tend to be situated soon after the death of

¹⁵⁸ This idea of ‘leading the life of opulence’ here shows a kinship with the critiques of *wāqifī wakīls* who withheld money from ‘Alī al-Riḍā from financial motives, as well as with the supporters of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ who absconded with the money collected on his behalf. See above, Chapter 4.

¹⁵⁹ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:518.

the Eleventh Imam.¹⁶⁰ This suggests that some compression of the narrative time of Ibn Mahziyār's biography has occurred, and that there may have been a later elaboration upon the theme of his conversion from doubt using the evidence drawn from the protocols of succession to the wakīlate instilled by his father. It is also possible, of course, that the early placement of his doubt was a later back-projection, and that he did indeed vanquish his doubt entirely only after 290/303, as indicated by the rescript issued by Abū Ja'far placing his conversion in the future. However, as I will argue below, when we discuss the problems with the authenticity of the rescript issued by Abū Ja'far, it seems more likely that the doubt of Ibn Mahziyār should be regarded primarily as placed in the earliest phase of the Occultation.

To sum up the reports regarding the doubt of Ibn Mahziyār, then, they suggest that among the important *wakīls*, there were some who had grave doubts about the idea of the Occultation at the time when it was first put forward by the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya* and figures in the household of the Imams in Samarra in the immediate aftermath of the death of Imam 'Askarī. In the case of Ibn Mahziyār, this doubt was said to have been vanquished by a rescript purporting to be from the Imam, which indicates an apparently miraculous knowledge of Ibn Mahziyār's initiation into the wakīlate, and the instructions his father gave him on his deathbed. In addition, we have a report which gives an account of direct contact between Ibn Mahziyār and the Hidden Imam,¹⁶¹ involving some secretive operations in the house of the Imams, and the sensation of the unseen voice of the Imam. The conversion of Ibn Mahziyār must have been politically significant, in that Ibn Mahziyār might have been expected to bring the community in Ahwāz with him into the Twelver fold. In spite of this calculation, however, the mention of Ahwāz is

¹⁶⁰ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276-7; Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:518.

¹⁶¹ Thus justifying Ibn Mahziyār's inclusion in Muḥammad al-Kūfī's list of the *wakīls* who saw the Hidden Imam.

very fleeting in reports in all our sources regarding the early Occultation, other than with relation to Ibn Mahziyār, suggesting that perhaps the struggle for the hearts and minds of the people of Ahwāz was not immediately successful. The later rescript of Abū Ja‘far regarding Ibn Mahziyār’s doubt suggests that whatever the facts of his activities in the era of the early nāḥiya, by the time of the Envoyship of Abū Ja‘far, the case of Ibn Mahziyār was still not satisfactorily resolved, and had to be settled by the production of an Imamic rescript.

5.17 How was a hidden imam possible?

How was it possible that a group of pious Imami *wakīls*, scholars and members of the Imam’s household could produce the doctrine of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam? The Twelver case is distinctive, for the *wakīls* claimed to be directly in touch with the Hidden Imam. One possibility, of course, is that in many cases the *wakīls* were perplexed themselves, and did not make such specific claims themselves, or at least not with such certainty, but these strengthened claims were attributed to them later. In the case of Aḥmad b. Ishāq,¹⁶² we will see a variety of types of contact with the Imam are imputed to him, which may represent the steady inflation of his role, from the claim that the Eleventh Imam merely wrote to him regarding the birth of the Child Imam, to the claim that Aḥmad b. Ishāq actually saw the Child Imam himself, eventually culminating with claim made by Ibn Rustum that he distributed statements on the Imam’s behalf. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that all of the claims made by *wakīls* to having contact with the Hidden Imam were generated posthumously through some kind of process of literary reworking. If we assume that some of the early *wakīls*, whether Ḥājiz, Aḥmad b. Ishāq, Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī or others, did indeed claim to be in touch with the Child Imam, then by what mechanisms did these claims become established, and what experiences were these

¹⁶² See Chapter 6.

claims based upon? Is there a way in which we can reconcile their religious devotion with their claims to be in touch with an apparently supernatural figure? Certainly it seems likely that the early *wakīls* had a great motivation to ensure continuity, but such motivations do not imply cynicism. How then, could they have contributed to the belief in a meeting with a Child whom they had not, indeed, met? It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to investigate into the cognitive aspects of belief in the unseen. Indeed, such an investigation is, in our case, unnecessary, for it is uncontroversial in the study of religion that believers report experiences which appear to lie outside the possibility of mundane reality, but which nonetheless are fully real to themselves.¹⁶³ While we can draw no certainty about such experiences from our sources, in which it is difficult, at the best of times, to distinguish between literary tropes and historical events, we can, nonetheless identify a number of themes among the accounts of the Hidden Imam which appear to suggest certain mechanisms by which belief in the Hidden Imam might have come about. These are useful archetypes for considering the context for the affective experience or ecstatic sensation of the presence of the Hidden Imam. Rather than assuming that the fabrication of reports was the engine of every doctrinal development, it is safer to assume that the, on the whole, the *wakīls* and the Shi‘i community in general, though certainly motivated by human interests were sincere in their responses to this great time of crisis. With this understanding, we can then begin to see how they might have and proceeded to address their problems through rational argumentation, exegetical research, contemplation, visionary inspiration, affective and ecstatic experience. Once these experiences were transmitted in the form of oral and written reports, a number of different epistemological responses could be taken

¹⁶³ The hearing of the voice of the Hidden Imam, which we discuss below, for example, might be compared with illuminating recent studies on hearing voices such as Tanya Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

towards the confusing mix of rumor, personal experience and documentary evidence generated as believers attempted to fill the void. For us, to sift through these materials, we must be alive both to the possibilities of later literary elaboration and systematization, but also to the possible origins of reports in a variety of historical institutions, mechanisms, archetypes, and cognitive states.

One factor in forging belief in the Hidden Imam is the pre-existence of prophecies and precedents which point to the existence of a Child Imam or a Hidden Imam, in particular the literature employed by the *wāqifa* over several generations previous to the Twelver Occultation. I have mentioned these in Chapter 1, but here we must consider them as efficient historical causes that operated not only in the realm of discourse, but were also shaped historical events. That is to say that the precedents for believing in a Hidden Imam made it more likely that a Hidden Imam would be considered a possibility at this moment also. The mythic archetypes of hidden children of miraculous precocity like Farīdūn and the infant Abraham¹⁶⁴ lay down molds into which speculation could flow. The fact that the *wāqifa* had already generated or repurposed hadith to pertain the Occultation of an Imam, and had compiled a significant literature on the Occultation of Mūsā al-Kāẓim meant that many of the channels through which belief in the Hidden Imam would flow were ready cut. The *wakīls* themselves, perplexed and seeking a solution, must also have been influenced by these precedents and archetypes. We have already addressed the rumors regarding the pregnancy of the concubine in the previous chapter. It is likely that these rumors were one of the original crucibles in which the ideas of the Child Imam were forged. Even once the existence of a Child Imam had been refuted by the surveillance of the authorities, these

¹⁶⁴ See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 137; Abū al-Qāsim Firdawsī, *The Shāhnāma of Firdausī*, translated by Edmond and George Warner (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd, 1905), 1:150-2.

rumors persisted. Again, though, this does not entirely explain the actions of the *wakīls* who claimed to be in touch with the Hidden Imam. These archetypes and the rumors surrounding the concubine's phantom pregnancy might have left them susceptible to other types of suggestion. We have several suggestions in our sources that dreams and ecstatic visions might have played a part.

One of the dominant mechanisms for contact with the Hidden Imam during the period of the *nāḥiya* appears to have been a supernatural voice (*hātif*), which conveys religious truths to the hearer, and afterwards (perhaps many years afterwards) is recognized to have been the Hidden Imam himself. These voices may, of course, be mere literary constructions, but they may have been a way in which believers found succor in their perplexity. There is a certain consistency to these reports, in all of which, the voice appears to back up claims that had already been made. This is not revelation, then, but confirmation. The experience of the voice confirms the institutional and doctrinal structures that were being defended by the *wakīls*, rather than generating new structures; they provided the hearer with a comforting sense that continuity would be maintained, rather than a radical break being introduced.

One such report involving a supernatural voice survives in different versions in Kulaynī's *Kāfi* and Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*, involving a certain Egyptian named 'Abd Rabbihi, or Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi. The differences in these two reports suggest they have a common source, but were probably transformed through oral transmission, rather alterations introduced into written copies. The following report is the version from Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*:

عن محمد بن جعفر الكوفي ، عن أبي خالد البصري وكان يسمى عبد ربه قال : خرجت في طريق مكة بعد مضي
أبي محمد (عليه السلام) بثلاث سنين فوردت المدينة واتيت صاريا فجلست في ظللة كانت لأبي محمد (عليه

السلام) وكان سيدي أبو محمد رام ان أتعشى عنده وانا أفكر في نفسي فلو كان شيء لظهر بعد ثلاث سنين فإذا بهاتف يقول لي اسمع صوته ولا أرى شخصه يا عبد ربه قل لأهل مصر هل رأيتم رسول الله (صلى الله عليه وآله) حيث آمنتم به قال : ولم أكن اعرف اسم أبي وذلك أني خرجت من مصر وانا طفل صغير فقلت ان صاحب الزمان بعد أبيه حق وان غيبته حق وانه الهاتف بي فزال عني الشك وثبت اليقين.

Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Kūfī>>>

Abū Khālid al-Baṣrī known as ‘Abd Rabbihi said: I went out on the Mecca road three years after the passing of Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] (AS) and I came to Medina and I came to Ṣuryā and I sat in the gazebo (*ẓulla*) that had belonged Abū Muḥammad (AS) [al-Hādī] and my Lord Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] used to entreat me to dine with him [there]. And I was thinking to myself “If there were something, then he would appear after three years.”

And lo! a voice (*hātif*) whose sound I could hear, without seeing his figure, said: “Oh ‘Abd Rabbihi, say to the people of Egypt, “Did you see God's Messenger (SAAA) when you came to believe in him?”

... And I said “Indeed the Lord of the Age (*ṣaḥib al-zamān*) after his father is true, and his Occultation is true, and he was the voice calling to me (*hātif bī*),” and the doubt fell from me, and certainty was established.¹⁶⁵

In this report, then, the voice puts the doubts of ‘Abd Rabbihi to rest by citing the epistemological challenge of accepting the truth of the Prophet Muḥammad, who was, by then, just as inaccessible to the senses as the Hidden Imam was.¹⁶⁶ The fact that ‘Abd Rabbihi was initially ‘thinking to himself’ (*qultu fi nafsi*) fits into a trope common in our sources, especially

¹⁶⁵ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277-8.

¹⁶⁶ Ibn Bābūya’s version of this report also includes the epistemological justification with reference to the Prophet Muḥammad, though it adds the detail that the voice calls during dinner with a certain Abū Ghānim. *Kamāl*, 491-2.

prevalent in the reports of the Nuṣayrī, Khaṣībī, in which a living Imam miraculously responds to an idea that the protagonist has only expressed to himself internally.¹⁶⁷ Thus the voice fits the mold of an Imamic figure. And sure enough, ‘Abd Rabbihi later realizes that the voice must have been that of the Imam.

In one of the reports quoted above, transmitted by a certain al-‘Āṣimī, a voice (*hātif*) responds to a man’s anxiety about the problem of delivering the canonical taxes in the doubtful era of Ḥājiz. This voice speaks to confirm Ḥājiz in authority as the one who “stands in the place of” the Hidden Imam or his *nāḥiya*.¹⁶⁸ This report, then purports to document we might call an ecstatic sensation of the presence of a supernatural voice, whom we assume to be the Hidden Imam,¹⁶⁹ who remains invisible, but answers the troubles generated by an anxious mind. We have at least one other report, quoted by Khaṣībī, that explicitly uses this word, *hātif*, to refer to the Hidden Imam.¹⁷⁰ Again, the ecstatic intuition of the Imam’s voice responds to confirm the structural dynamics of the community that are again beginning to prevail and establish some semblance of continuity with the state of affairs before the death of the Eleventh Imam. In addition, as we have seen, Ibn Mahziyār’s conversion from doubt, is, in one report, precipitated by his sensation of a voice in the house of the Imams which sets his doubts to rest. In a further *hātif* report, the voice actually intervenes to interpret, and later to miraculously correct the text of a rescript that has been issued from Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī in the Imam’s name, again enforcing the necessity of sending money to the *nāḥiya*.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 281-2; 293.

¹⁶⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498.

¹⁶⁹ This is, of course, an assumption generated by the context of later later doctrine, and may not necessarily represent the original purpose of the report.

¹⁷⁰ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277-8.

¹⁷¹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 522.

In a slightly different context, Abū Ja‘far finds the text of one of the rescripts, saying “I found in his handwriting.” We presume this to be the handwriting of the Hidden Imam, though it is possible that it was something in the handwriting of his father or of the Eleventh Imam, and either Abū Ja‘far or one of his transmitters equivocated about the identity of the writer of the rescript, in order to strengthen the Occultation idea.

Thus these elements establish a framework in which the experience of contact with the Hidden Imam can be understood to have occurred, though they also continue to exist as literary artifacts that continue to be manipulated and redacted in later versions. The occurrence of ecstatic experiences, the generation of rumors and the intentional generation and circulation of both existing and new materials must all have played a part in the piecemeal generation of the narrative of the Hidden Imam.

There is also evidence in the sources that the experience of contacting the Hidden Imam must have been orchestrated by a calculated hand. We will deal with this as we investigate the career of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, but here let it suffice us to say that even though the *wakīls* may have to some extent manipulated the mechanisms and the theatricality of the Imamate to produce certain effects upon the believers, this does not necessitate that they should be understood as cynical actors. Humans are always very readily able to harmonize contradictions in order to continue to live in the world, and a theatrical element has often been visible alongside purist intentions.

5.18 Summing up the early wakīlate of the Era of Perplexity

None of what we have covered in this chapter is very satisfactory. There are too many contradictory narratives, too many ambiguous figures to make very certain conclusions about the state of the early Occultation wakīlate. Indeed, the very naming of this period as the Occultation

era is misleading, as the belief in a concealed Child Imam was very likely to have been a minority position at first. And yet it is during the first couple of decades after 260/874 that we must look to for the seeds of the Twelver synthesis that was more firmly established later. While it is possible that much of our evidence for this period was produced in the mill of later elaboration, there are a number of central themes that recur enough to suggest that they must represent some historical dynamics.

The first key insight that we have gained through the course of my analysis in this chapter is the rupture between the early generation the old guard of ‘Askarī’s men, and the later generation who had no contact with ‘Askarī. This helps us see identify a number of key figures in this older generation, based in Samarra, Baghdad and Qumm who were active in the earliest period of the Occultation, and who defined the first emergence of the Twelver synthesis. Among these we can identify particular types emerging: Aḥmad b. Ishāq as a Qummī delegate or regional *wakīl* with the autonomous epistemic authority of the scholar, who appears as gatekeeper to the knowledge necessary to recognizing the Imam, and, as we shall see, to the legacy of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī as eyewitness to the Imam; Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshā’ as a *wakīl* endowed with the sacral-fiscal authority of the *wikāla* network underscored by Imamic rescript; and later al-Asadī, who was not a member of this old guard, but is rather a transitional authority who follows Ḥājiz in the *wakīlate*, without having the crucial claim to having served the Eleventh Imam, or , in all likelihood, having claimed to see the Hidden Imam himself.

While the crisis in the household of the Imam unfolded, continuity was demanded by members of the community who still relied upon the purificatory, salvific function of the sacred economy of canonical taxes. The Qummīs and other people from the *Jibāl* of Iran were actively seeking an Imam to whom to bring their canonical taxes. These attempts were in some cases

inconclusive, but they generated a literary resource of reports that ultimately indicated the existence of an Imam, who initially continued to reside in Samarra. Aḥmad b. Ishāq's name has been passed down as a key figure in the formulation of these reports, and as a delegate or regional *wakīl* who regularly travelled between Qumm and Iraq, he may indeed have been pivotal in establishing an alliance between the Qummīs who wanted to continue as they were used to, and the *wakīls* based in Samarra and Baghdad who wanted to maintain the continuity of the central institutions of the Imamate upon which their belief and their place in society depended. Ultimately this Qummī-Baghdadi alliance became the axis upon which the new Twelver synthesis was developed. Aḥmad b. Ishāq, as we shall see, is depicted as associating with the elder 'Amrī, but not the younger. In the *Dalā'il*, Aḥmad b. Ishāq appears in the role of the *wakīl*, after whose death the Imam goes into full Occultation, suggesting that he may have been the single man to survive the old guard mentioned by Abū Sahl.

As depicted in narrative reports, Ḥājiz is the dominant *wakīl* among a number of named *wakīls* from the earliest period. He seems to have been initially associated with Ja'far 'the Liar,' but soon repudiated Ja'far, to collect money on behalf of a hidden Imam – and probably declaring for the Hidden Child Imam at some stage before his death, though it is likely that initially he may have collected in the name of the Eleventh Imam, or an as-yet unnamed, undefined Twelfth Imam. It may have been Ḥājiz who survived the other members of the old guard, and ordered the people to secrecy (*kitmān*), regarding the Occultation doctrine. Ḥājiz usually appears to be acting autonomously, though one later elaboration aims to subordinate Ḥājiz to Abū Ja'far, though this appears to be an effort to bring the early archetype of Ḥājiz's authority under the aegis of the Four Envoys theory. Abū Ja'far, appears, however, to have been linked to Ḥājiz only through his adoption of the same dynamics of *wakīlate* as Ḥājiz: operating

the fiscal administration from Baghdad while retaining contact with allies in Samarra: probably servants in the household of the Imams, who functioned primarily as an evidentiary mechanism to prove the legitimacy of the Baghdad *nāhiya*. Al-Asadī represents a bridge between the old guard, as Ḥājiz's successor, but himself coming from a younger generation, later being associated with Abū Ja'far.

While the idea of Occultation may initially have been a minority position among the various solutions proposed, as those involved in the early *wakīlate* died off, the explanatory power of reports about the Hidden Child Imam would have been greater, as fewer people survived who could attest to the more messy realities of the period of perplexity through which they had lived. The deaths of both Aḥmad b. Ishāq and Ḥājiz are mentioned as important turning points in the early community. The legacy of both of these contribute to the foundational story of the Occultation, and also to the institutional dynamics that the younger generation was to inherit, and which Abū Ja'far was eventually to tailor into the office of Envoy, following a perplexity moment of rupture.

Chapter 6: ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī: Envoy or *wakīl*?

6.1 Overview

We have mentioned ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was one of the old guard of companions of al-‘Askarī who survived long enough to attest to the existence of the Child Imam in the earliest phase of the Occultation. This more or less covers his historical activities during the Occultation period, as far as they appear in narrative reports. In contrast to his traditional canonized role, among the early sources, we find no narrative reports that depict ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd acting as a *wakīl* in the Occultation era: collecting the canonical taxes or issuing the Imam’s statements. Nonetheless, he was to become canonized as one of the Four Envoys, and a greater tradition was later elaborated upon the framework provided by the sparse facts known about him. Given his importance in the Twelver canonical narrative, we must spend some time analyzing closely the reports that are transmitted about him, which not only allow us to make some conclusions about the historical events in the early Occultation period, but also give us a valuable window onto the development of the canonical narrative of the Four Envoys in the first century of Twelver Shi‘ism.

Who was ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd? He appears in our sources as a trusted helper to the Eleventh Imam, but the absence of information about him in the biographical dictionaries suggests that he must have been an obscure figure in the Shi‘i community. Any facts that might have been current regarding him amongst his contemporaries have been obscured further by the doctrinal elaboration of his role in the Occultation narrative over the course of the subsequent years. I will argue that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s significance lay initially in the fact that he was deployed by Qummī scholars as a singularly trustworthy witness to the existence of the Hidden Child Imam, who was, some claimed, the inaccessible successor to the Eleventh Imam. Thus, the testimony of

‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd provided a powerful idea in the struggle to unite the community around the leadership of the Hidden Imam. In order to establish firm epistemological foundations for the new iteration of the Occultation doctrine, it was necessary that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd be depicted as a witness of unparalleled veracity with intimate access to the Imam’s household. It is probably that only later, after the authority of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī had been established that claims were made that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was an ‘Envoy’ holding authority in the name of the Hidden Imam.

Throughout this chapter we will be assessing both the *epistemological* function of proving the existence of the Twelfth Imam, and the distinct, yet associated *institutional* function of acting as the official spokesperson of the Imams, both during their lives, and during the Occultation era. In many cases we will not be able to make a definitive call as to whether a figure was involved purely with the epistemological dimension of the Occultation or the institutional dimension of operation of the Imamate.

When we try to piece together what might be the facts of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as a historical figure, rather than a doctrinal trope, we are left with few details. Even his name is subject to a number of separate debates and confusions. Ṭūsī mentions that he was from Samarra, and was therefore nicknamed al-‘Askarī.¹ It is likely that he was of humble birth, without any prestigious forbears amongst the Shi‘a that would have led to his lineage being more carefully preserved. Ṭūsī, in his *Rijāl*, places ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd in the chapter on companions of the Tenth Imam, al-Hādī:

عثمان بن سعيد العمري ، يكني أبا عمرو السمان ، ويقال له : الزيات خدمه عليه السلام وله إحدى عشره سنة ،
وله إليه عهد معروف .

¹ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 354.

‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī bearing the *kunya* Abū ‘Amr, known as the Oil Merchant (*al-zayyāt*). He served [the Imam] (AS) from the age of eleven, and he had a well-known commission on [the Imam’s] behalf (*wa lahu ilayhi ‘ahd ma ‘rūf*).²

This gives us some hints as to an occupational profile, but they are not very clear. Leaving aside, for the moment, the question of this “well-known commission” which refers to his status as prominent *wakīl* of the Imam, let us consider the statement that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd served the Imam from the age of 11. Both the age at which he entered service, and the use of the verb ‘he served’ (*khadama*) suggest that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd might have been some kind of a household servant. If this is the case, he then fits into a very familiar typology: the servant eyewitness. Other servants appear in the sources in a similar role to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd: as crucial eyewitnesses to the birth of the Child Imam.³ The case of Badr the Eunuch, who was addressed in the previous chapter, is a particularly interesting comparison, for Badr is also depicted as exercising authority as an intermediary for the Hidden Imam.

We have some hints as to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s social placement in his sobriquet “The Oil Merchant” (*al-zayyāt*), or “The Fat Merchant” (*al-sammān*). If he was, indeed, a trader in cooking oil and cooking fat, this does not necessarily contradict the possibility that he was a household servant to the Imam, for it may have been his profession later in his life. Equally it may have been a family name that originated in the profession of his father or grandfather. Note that this profession does not necessarily suggest low rank, there being various Oil Merchants

² Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 390.

³ Various servants who were eyewitnesses appear in our sources, including Abū Naṣr Zārīf (Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 1: 332); an unnamed man from Fārs and a slave girl, (Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 1:514-5); Naṣīm, (*Hidāya*, 268); and Abū Ghānim (Ibn Bābūya, 431). In addition, as we have seen, ‘Aqīd the Servant is an important witness to the death of the Eleventh Imam, and participated in his washing. See the previous chapter. Also Kāfūr the Eunuch, mentioned as *thiqa* in Ṭūsī’s *Rijāl*, 390.

recorded among the prominent members of ‘Abbasid society of the time.⁴ It does, however, suggest that he was not of an established scholarly or elite family.⁵ This is perhaps an important point in placing some distance between the ‘Amrī family and the sacral aristocracy of the Imams whom he represented, as well as the scholarly and aristocratic elites like the brothers al-Sharīf al-Raḍī and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā who acted as the leaders of the Shi‘i community in the Fifth/Eleventh century. The earliest sources give no background on the significance of the soubriquet, “The Oil Merchant”, but eventually it began to acquire the gloss that seems designed to preserve the increasingly hagiographical presentation of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd once his role as ‘the First Envoy’ had become dogma. Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba* depicts ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as having transported canonical Islamic taxes to the Imam in order to escape the gaze of the persecuting authorities:

ويقال له : السمان ، لأنه كان يتجر في السمن تغطية على الامر . وكان الشيعة إذا حملوا إلى أبي محمد عليه السلام ما يجب عليهم حمله من الأموال أنفذوا إلى أبي عمرو ، فيجعله في جراب السمن وزقاقه ويحمله إلى أبي محمد عليه السلام تقية وخوفاً.

And he was called “The Fat-Merchant” (*al-sammān*) because he traded in [cooking] fat as a way of hiding the Imamate (*amr*). And when the Shi‘a carried the money which they were obliged to carry to Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī, the Eleventh Imam] (AS), they dispatched it to Abū ‘Amr [‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd] and he put it the oil sacks (*jurāb al-saman*) and oil skins (*ziqāq*) and carried it to Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] (AS) out of *taqiyya* and fear.⁶

⁴ See Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, translation, 34: 10-11, with reference to the vizier named al-Zayyāt: suggests it could be consistent with high rank.

⁵ See, Shelomo Dov Goitein, “The Bourgeoisie in Early Islamic Times,” *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 236-7 (and in general), for a discussion of the professional lives of high-ranking courtiers.

⁶ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 219-20.

This, then, suggests that the profession of fat merchant was fabricated purely to provide a pretext for transporting money to and from the Imam. However, Ṭūsī’s informant, Ibn Barniyya, does not give a chain of transmission, as he usually would, and so it would seem possible that this is merely common wisdom; a later, perhaps fanciful elaboration of the bare facts that existed in early sources, generated from the existence of the nickname, “The Oil Merchant.” Furthermore, Ibn Barniyya, the great-grandson of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, is responsible for the circulation of reports that burnish the reputation of his ancestors.⁷ This kind of gloss on his soubriquet may have been a way of saving ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd from the taint of trade once he had come to be viewed as a figure of great significance, and a way of filling in the gaping *lacunae* regarding his life.

As an indicator of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s initial obscurity, there is a certain amount of confusion about his name, which is given by one of our earliest sources, Kashshī, as Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr, and that of his son as Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr.⁸ While ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd becomes the commonly accepted name for him, following Ṭūsī, the confusion is not entirely resolved by the later *Rijāl* authors. Thus, for example, al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, in *Khūlāṣat al-aqwāl*, prefers to retain a biography for *both* Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr, “known as al-‘Amrī, the *wakīl* of Abū Muḥammad al-‘Askarī” *and* ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, both of which are said to have a son Muḥammad.⁹

6.2 ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was not an Envoy during the Occultation

In contrast to the canonical Twelver narratives, while ‘Uthmān may have been a servant or *wakīl* in the service of the Eleventh Imam, we can see no clear evidence in the early sources that he acted in the capacity of ‘Envoy’; that is to say, we see nowhere the indication that he had

⁷ Klemm, “*Sufarā’*,” 148.

⁸ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 377.

⁹ ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, *Khūlāṣat al-Aqwāl*, 255.

any autonomous authority during the Occultation era. Klemm was the first to draw attention to the fact that the sources do not give convincing evidence that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī was an Envoy, as she says, “the ‘Amrīs appears to have been at best confidants and assistants to the eleventh Imām.”¹⁰ While I will argue that this does not apply to Abū Ja‘far, not least because he did not belong to the older generation, this seems to be a fairly accurate representation of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s role. It must be emphasized that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd does appear as a *wakīl* in a number of reports, but crucially, these show him as a pre-Occultation figure, with no major role in the period after the death of the Eleventh Imam, except insofar as he survived the Imam long enough to act as an eyewitness to the existence of the Child Imam. The fact that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd appears as almost entirely a pre-Occultation figure has never been satisfactorily acknowledged in the secondary literature on the Occultation. For this reason I will now lay out some of the evidence suggesting that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was almost entirely a pre-Occultation figure.

6.3 ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was a *wakīl* during the lifetime of the Eleventh Imam

While there are various statements in which ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd is mentioned as an Envoy or *wakīl* in the Occultation era,¹¹ these are largely statements of doctrine, rather than narrative reports, suggesting that they were appended to the existing body of reports about the Occultation in order to streamline interpretations to conform to the developing canon of the Four Envoys. Kulaynī displays no knowledge of the classical narrative of the Four Envoys, but appears instead to know about a more amorphous anonymous group of *wakīls*, yet he narrates reports in which ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was a trusted *wakīl* who acted on behalf of the Eleventh Imam. While this

¹⁰ Klemm, “*Sufarā’*,” 146.

¹¹ See below.

appears to have been adapted in the recension of ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, we can at least assume that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was useful as a witness for the Child Imam precisely because he was someone who was known to have been close to the Eleventh Imam, and who might therefore have reasonably been expected to have had a chance of seeing the Child Imam. Kashshī also displays no knowledge of the classical narrative of the Four Envoys, but he depicts al-‘Amrī (who he knows as Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr al-‘Amrī, rather than ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd), as collecting dues on behalf of the Imam.¹² In one report, transmitted by a Nishapuri *wakīl* Ishāq b. Ismā‘īl al-Nīsabūrī, a rescript is issued to the *wakīl* in which various *wakīls* are praised, including al-Bilālī, who would later oppose Abū Ja‘far in the Occultation period, but here is praised as “the reliable, the trustworthy” (*al-thiqa al-ma‘mūn*). However, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd does appear to be picked out for particular praise:

العمرى رضى الله عنه برضاى عنه ، وتسلم عليه وتعرفه ويعرفك فإنه الطاهر الأمين العفيف القريب منا والينا ،
فكل ما يحمل إلينا من شئ من النواحي فإليه المسير... ليوصل ذلك إلينا

Al-‘Amrī [‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd] (May God be pleased with him as I am pleased with him)... is the pure one, the trustworthy, self-controlled, close to us and from us, and everything that is carried to us at all from the regions (*nawāḥī*), it travels to him... so that he may transport that to us, thanks be to God...¹³

In this statement, al-‘Amrī (who we take to be ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, due to the fact that he was a member of ‘Askarī’s old guard, unlike Abū Ja‘far) does appear to be acting in the role of the centralizing *wakīl* at the heart of the *wikāla* network. It is quite likely that this was a historical detail, though it is hard to be certain, given the canonizing mutations of the Occultation period.

¹² Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 377; 409-10

¹³ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 410.

Certainly we may state that the image of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as high-*wakīl* to the Eleventh Imam was a legacy which would be crucial to his remembrance later in the Occultation period.

An important testimony to the historicity of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s *wakīlate* is in the words of Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-Karkhī, a later detractor of the authority of the younger ‘Amrī, Abū Ja‘far. When asked why he denies the *wakīlate* of Abū Ja‘far, Aḥmad b. Hilāl says,

لم أسمعه ينص عليه بالوكالة ، وليس أنكر أباه - يعني عثمان بن سعيد - فأما أن أقطع أن أبا جعفر وكيل صاحب
الزمان فلا أجسر عليه

I did not hear [the Imam] designate [Abū Ja‘far] for the *wikāla*, though God does not deny his father (meaning ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd), but as for stating with certainty that Abū Ja‘far is the *wakīl* of the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*), well, I do not dare to.¹⁴

Thus it appears that even an opponent of Abū Ja‘far accepted the status of his father as *wakīl*, though this does not necessarily suppose that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s *wakīlate* was anything out of the ordinary. As for the obscurity of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, this is not particularly unusual for the *wakīls* of earlier Imams. While there were earlier *wakīls* who were also prominent scholars or community figures,¹⁵ there were also many who are listed in the *rijāl* works as *wakīls* who are otherwise almost unknown. Thus, the relative obscurity of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd does not suggest that he was not a *wakīl*.

From these pieces of evidence, we may conclude that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s service on behalf of the Imams, either as a trusted household servant or a *wakīl* (the dividing line between these two is, perhaps, muddy) was very probably a historical fact, upon which foundation the conception of his far greater status as an Envoy was eventually elaborated.

¹⁴ Tusi, *Ghayba*, 248.

¹⁵ See, for example, the discussion of the Ibn Mahziyār family, in Chapter 5 and 7.

6.4 The death of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as a means of anointing Abū Ja‘far

While our analysis of the earliest narratives suggests that the genealogy of the position of Envoy leads back mainly to the figure of Ḥajjiz, later Twelver tradition prefers to provide Abū Ja‘far with a doctrinally water-tight legitimacy based on the quasi-Imamic mechanism of designation from his father and the Imams. This is clearly visible in statements and narratives that refer to the death of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd and Abū Ja‘far’s succession to his authority. The classic version of such statements of succession is a statement by Ṭūsī in his *Ghayba* provided without quotation or *isnād*:

فلما مضى أبو عمرو عثمان بن سعيد قام ابنه أبو جعفر محمد بن عثمان مقامه بنص أبي محمد عليه السلام عليه
. ونص أبيه عثمان عليه بأمر القائم عليه السلام

And when Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd died, his son Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān took his position through the designation (*naṣṣ*) of Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] (AS), and the designation of his father ‘Uthmān upon him by order of the *Qā’im* [the Twelfth Imam].¹⁶

This, then, is a clear statement of dogma, rather than a narrative preserved from the past. It is dogma as produced by a theologian, providing a clear framework for understanding the Envoyship within the doctrinal mechanisms of Imamate. Thus the continuous designation (*naṣṣ*) is here seen to extend to the Envoys also. *Naṣṣ* designation is the quintessential Imami doctrinal mechanism for proving that their Imams were party to an unbroken transmission of divine guidance from the time of ‘Alī. This designation is seen to issue from the Imam himself, rather than the previous Envoy, so as to protect the Envoys from any accusation of deriving their authority from purely mundane political succession. It is in a similar light that we must

¹⁶ Tusi, *Ghayba*, 223.

understand the succession narratives linked to the death of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd. Thus, Ibn Bābūya quotes a rescript (*tawqī‘*) that shows an explicit statement of the succession between the elder and younger ‘Amrī. As with the *thiqa* hadith which we will analyze below, this report is transmitted by the pro-‘Amrī scholar ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī:

وخرج التوقيع إلى الشيخ أبي جعفر محمد ابن عثمان العمري في التعزية بأبيه رضي الله عنهما في فصل من الكتاب " ... عاش أبوك سعيدا ومات حميدا ...
وفي فصل آخر : " ... وكان من كمال سعادته أن رزقه الله عز وجل ولدا مثلك يخلفه من بعده ، ويقوم مقامه بأمره ...

The rescript (*tawqī‘*) came out to Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī, in mourning (*ta‘ziya*) for his father (RAA). In part of the letter it said, “... your father lived happy and died praised...” and in another part: "... and it was part of the perfection of his felicity that God (AJ) provided him with a son like you to succeed him after him and take his place [*yaqūma maqāmahu bi-amrihi*] in [the Imam’s] affair (*amr*) [i.e. the Safīrate]...”¹⁷

‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far, then, appears again to be a key node for the transmission of reports in support of the ‘Amrīs. The issuing of a rescript to Abū Ja‘far himself, which was then transmitted via the pro-‘Amrī ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī suggests that the report of the succession of Abū Ja‘far to his father was generated as propaganda to support his authority following the interregnum after the death of the old guard. Nonetheless, given that we have no reports of *wakīl*-style activities undertaken by ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd during the Occultation, we must assume that the legacy which Abū Ja‘far was tracing back to his father was one of general

¹⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 510.

religious probity and intimacy with the Imams, rather than the specific institutional role of Envoy.

There is one further succession report from Ibn Mahziyār, which I will analyze in Chapter 7. This report, extolling Abū Ja‘far, was transmitted in 280/893 before which ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s must have died, and his son, Abū Ja‘far must have begun to make his claims to authority.

6.5 ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was barely active during the Occultation

There are various clear indications that mention Abū Ja‘far as the Occultation-era leader of the *nāḥiya*, in contrast with ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd who is mentioned as a pre-Occultation *wakīl*. For example, in Kashshī’s *Rijāl*, the ‘Amrīs are not even given their own biography, but are mentioned parenthetically in order to gloss their appearance in the biographies of another pair of *wakīls*: Ibn Mahziyār, father and son. I have quoted this biography in the previous chapter, but I will repeat here the parenthetical gloss in which Kashshī refers to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr, further evidence of the obscure origins of the ‘Amrīs. However, their roles are clearly recognizable and comparable with other early sources:

Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr was the *wakīl* of Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī]. And as for Abū Ja‘far b. Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr, well, he was the son of al-‘Amrī, and he was the *wakīl* of the *nāḥiya*, and the affair [i.e. leadership of the Shi‘i community] revolved around him (*wa kāna al-amr yadūru ‘alayhi*).¹⁸

Again, this account suggests a clear chronological separation between the elder ‘Amrī who is identified as the *wakīl* of the Eleventh Imam, while Abū Ja‘far is identified, not as the *wakīl* of a

¹⁸ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 377

named Imam, but rather as the *wakīl* of the *nāḥiya*, a word reserved almost exclusively¹⁹ for the Occultation-era continuation of the Imamic institutions.²⁰ In Kashshī’s report, then, Abū Ja‘far, not his father, is indicated as having clear authority in the context of the Occultation era *nāḥiya*, as seen in the phrase, “and the [leadership of the Shi‘i community] revolved around him (*wa kāna al-amr yadūru ‘alayhi*).” This report is consistent with the idea that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was a close, though somewhat obscure servant of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams, but it was Abū Ja‘far alone who claimed authority in the Occultation era. If ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd did survive the Eleventh Imam, then his prestige was nonetheless tied to having been that Imam’s *wakīl* during his life, rather than claiming any special authority in the Occultation era. Abū Ja‘far, on the other hand, is clearly depicted as claiming authority in the Occultation era. Kulaynī, like Kashshī mentions the ‘Amrīs only fleetingly. Both of these authors thereby reflect the early fourth/tenth century milieu in which the authority of explicitly named *wakīls* had not yet acquired great doctrinal significance.

By the time of Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya*, we begin to see a relatively large number of reports regarding the activities of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī as having been associated with the Eleventh Imam, to the extent that it caused great anxiety for Nuṣayrīs who saw his role as conflicting with the authority of the pre-Occultation *bāb*-hood of Ibn Nuṣayr.²¹ Another report in the *Hidāya* corroborates this image. When a number of followers of the Eleventh Imam voice

¹⁹ See Chapter 3.

²⁰ As we mentioned in our discussion of the term *nāḥiya* in Chapter 3, the term is a metonymy for an ambiguous institutional complex associated with the fiscal agents, and eventually, with the Hidden Imam. This word *nāḥiya* euphemistically avoids enquiry into the exact relationship of this institution with the Imam: whether or not the Hidden Twelfth Imam exists, or if the *nāḥiya* just represents the continuity of the institutions of the dead Eleventh Imam.

²¹ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276; 394-5. It is unclear when Ibn Nuṣayr died. Friedman places his death date as “after 868”, “Ebn Nuṣayr,” EIr. Certainly though he is most clearly identified as a figure associated with the Eleventh Imam.

their anxiety about the roles of Ibn Nuṣayr and ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, Kāfūr the Eunuch comes to them and reports the following words from the Imam:

عثمان بن سعيد العمري وكيل في مالي وابنه محمد وكيل ابني المهدي

‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī is my *wakīl* over my money, and Muḥammad [Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī] is the *wakīl* of my son, the awaited Mahdī.²²

Again, this corroborates the distinction found in Kashshī in which ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd is seen to operate in the pre-Occultation era, under the Eleventh Imam, while Abū Ja‘far is seen as operating in the Occultation era. A further report in the *Hidāya*, addresses the anxiety regarding the relationship between the *bābs* and the *wakīls* in a remarkable manner,²³ by incorporating Abū Ja‘far into the genealogy of spiritual authority of Ibn Nuṣayr. Again however, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd is left out:

عن محمد بن إسماعيل الحسني عن أبي الحسن صاحب العسكر ... كانت كتبه ودلائله وتوقيعاته (عليه السلام)
تخرج على يد أبي شعيب محمد بن نصير بن بكر النميري البصري فلما توفي خرجت على يد جدته أم أبي محمد (عليه السلام)
وعلى ابنه محمد بن عثمان

Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Ḥasanī said about Abū al-Ḥasan Ṣāhib al-‘Askar [al-Hādī]:... [The Imam's] letters and signs and rescripts (*tawqī‘āt*) were issued at the hands of Abū Shu‘ayb Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr Bakr al-Namīrī, and when he died they were issued at the hands of the [Child Imam's] grandmother, Umm Abū Muḥammad and his son Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān.²⁴

²² Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 394. See below for further discussion of this report.

²³ Quoted also above in Chapter 4.

²⁴ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 276.

Here a different compromise is struck between the Nuṣayrī and the new Twelver spiritual-institutional genealogies which depicts a transition of authority from Ibn Nuṣayr, to the Eleventh Imam's mother, to Abū Ja'far, excluding 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd. Again, then, 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd is left out of the Occultation era.

Ibn Bābūya quotes many reports of the activities of Abū Ja'far, but gives only scant mention of 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd, and these reports are, again, linked to the lifetime of the Eleventh Imam. Nu'mānī's *Ghayba*, which was the first to introduce the classical understanding of the two Occultations, the first of which is defined by the mediating presence of Envoys, does not mention the names of any of these figures, but only describes their mediatory role in general²⁵ terms, and so does not help us to understand the role of 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd. Mufīd does mention the Envoys, though he does not yet produce the classical canon of the Four Envoys.²⁶ Only with Ṭūsī's *Ghayba*, composed around 448/1056-57, do we have a clear indication of Four "Praised Envoys", starting with 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd al-'Amrī. Ṭūsī did not invent the notion out of whole cloth, but must have been systematizing a notion of the importance of the 'Amrīs which must already have been fairly well established. One source that Ṭūsī relies upon for his understanding of the Four Envoys is Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh Ibn Barniyya, the son of the daughter of Abū Ja'far al-'Amrī himself.²⁷ Ibn Barniyya's contribution to the understanding of the 'Amrīs is indisputably hagiographical, though it may well add important details that were transmitted through family tradition.

In spite of the clear agenda to establish as canonical the narrative of the Four Envoys starting with 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd, Ṭūsī's *Ghayba* also contains reports that plainly suggest that only

²⁵ Nu'mānī, *Ghayba*, 164; 178-9.

²⁶ See Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 86.

²⁷ Klemm, "Sufarā'," 148.

the younger ‘Amrī, Abū Ja‘far, held real authority during the era of Occultation, leaving ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd out of the reckoning of Occultation-era leaders:

وذكر أبو نصر هبة الله [بن] محمد بن أحمد أن أبا جعفر العمري رحمه الله مات في سنة أربع وثلاثمائة ، وأنه كان يتولى هذا الامر نحو من خمسين سنة يحمل الناس إليه أموالهم ، ويخرج إليهم التوقيعات بالخط الذي كان يخرج في حياة الحسن عليه السلام إليهم بالمهمات في أمر الدين والدنيا وفيما يسألونه من المسائل بالأجوبة العجيبة

And Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad [Ibn Barniyya] mentioned that Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī (RA) died in the year 304, and that he was in charge of this affair (*amr*) for a good part of fifty years (*naḥwan min khamsīn sana*), the people carrying their monies to him. And the rescripts (*tawqī‘āt*) were issued to him in the handwriting which would issue during the lifetime of al-Ḥasan [al-‘Askarī] (AS) to [his followers] containing important matters in the realm of religion and mundane life, and in which they asked him questions with wondrous answers²⁸

While Ibn Barniyya’s testimony is rather partial, at the very least, the dating here seems to exclude ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd from any Occultation era role, for if Abū Ja‘far died in 304/916, or as it is elsewhere stated, 305/917, and he was the preeminent *wakīl* for approaching fifty years, then he would have begun his tenure around 254/870, four years before the death of the Eleventh Imam. However, the phrase “a good part of fifty years (*naḥw^{an} min khamsīn sana*) seems to suggest a certain equivocation, suggesting instead something more messy and complicated.

These reports supply contradictory details, and we will return later to the question of exactly how Abū Ja‘far might have acceded to authority, but suffice it to say now that there is

²⁸ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, Najaf.

clear evidence within the early Twelver and Nuṣayrī sources which contradicts the idea that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was an Envoy in line with the classical narrative presented by Ṭūsī, which presents him as a preeminent authority acting on behalf of the Hidden Imam during the Occultation period, receiving taxes and making statements on his behalf. Not only is there is no evidence that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was engaged in *wakīl*-like activities in the era after the death of the Eleventh Imam, but even the canonical Twelver sources carry reports which explicitly split off the two ‘Amrīs into pre- and post-Occultation roles, saying that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s was the Imam’s pre-Occultation *wakīl*, while Abū Ja‘far was the preeminent figure in the Occultation-era *nāḥiya*.

6.6 ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as eyewitness and ‘the reliable’

Kulaynī’s *Kāfi*, our earliest source for the activities of the *wakīls* in the Occultation era, has very little to say about the activities of either of the ‘Amrīs. While Kulaynī carries many reports regarding the collection of funds in the Occultation era, these tend to refer to the recipients of the funds using vague and euphemistic terms, *nāḥiya* (region) or *gharīm* (creditor; the one to whom debts are due) which might refer either to the Imam himself, or metonymically to the Imam’s establishment, including his *wakīls* in general.²⁹ This suggests that in the earliest period, the institutions of Imamate may have continued to operate in the Imam’s name, without explicitly stating the identity of the Imam. This euphemistic phraseology corroborates hints in the reports that the early mediatory functions were carried out by a more or less anonymous elite group of *wakīls* who continued the work they had carried out during the Tenth and Eleventh Imams’ lifetimes. As for ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, he is not depicted in Kulaynī’s *Kāfi* as carrying out the activities of a tax-collector at all. The key report transmitted by Kulaynī about ‘Uthmān b.

²⁹ See Chapter 3.

Sa'īd is reported on the authority of two figures who were crucial in the formation of the Occultation-era understanding of the Hidden Imam: 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far al-Ḥimyarī and Aḥmad b. Ishāq, both prominent Qummīs. I will quote this report in full, as the Kāfī is our earliest source to give explicit mention of the role of the 'Amrīs, and one of the key reports that circulated in support of the existence of the Hidden Imam. While there are several versions of this report, this particular version is a composite of three separate reports:³⁰

(1)

محمد بن عبد الله ومحمد بن يحيى جميعا ، عن عبد الله بن جعفر الحميري قال : اجتمعت أنا والشيخ أبو عمرو رحمه الله عند أحمد بن إسحاق فغمزني أحمد بن إسحاق أن أسأله عن الخلف فقلت له : يا أبا عمرو إني أريد أن أسألك عن شيء وما أنا بشاك فيما أريد أن أسألك عنه ، فإن اعتقادي وديني أن الأرض لا تخلو من حجة إلا إذا كان قبل يوم القيامة بأربعين يوما ، فإذا كان ذلك رفعت الحجة وأغلق باب التوبة فلم يك ينفع نفسا إيمانها لم تكن آمنت من قبل أو كسبت في إيمانها خيرا ، فأولئك أشرار من خلق الله عز وجل وهم الذين تقوم عليهم القيامة ولكنني أحببت أن أزداد يقينا وإن إبراهيم عليه السلام سأل ربه عز وجل أن يريه كيف يحيي الموتى ، قال : أو لم تؤمن قال : بلى ولكن ليطمئن قلبي.

(2)

وقد أخبرني أبو علي أحمد بن إسحاق ، عن أبي الحسن عليه السلام قال : سألته وقلت : من أعامل أو عمن آخذ ، وقول من أقبل ؟ فقال له : العمري ثقني فما أدى إليك عني فعني يؤدي وما قال لك عني فعني يقول ، فاسمع له وأطع ، فإنه الثقة المأمون.

(1)

³⁰ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 329-330.

وأخبرني أبو علي أنه سأل أبا محمد عليه السلام عن مثل ذلك ، فقال له : العمري وابنه ثقان ، فما أديا إليك عني فعني يؤديان وما قال لك فعني يقولان ، فاسمع لهما وأطعمهما فإنهما الثقتان المأمونان ، فهذا قول إمامين قد مضيا فيك . قال : فخر أبو عمرو ساجدا وبكى ثم قال : سل حاجتك فقلت له : أنت رأيت الخلف من بعد أبي محمد عليه السلام ؟ فقال : إي والله ورقبته مثل ذا - وأوماً بيده - فقلت له : فبقيت واحدة فقال لي : هات ، قلت : فالاسم ؟ قال : محرم عليكم أن تسألوا عن ذلك ، ولا أقول هذا من عندي ، فليس لي أن أحلل ولا أحرم ، ولكن عنه عليه السلام ، فإن الامر عند السلطان ، أن أبا محمد مضى ولم يخلف ولدا وقسم ميراثه وأخذه من لا حق له فيه وهوذا ، عياله يجولون ليس أحد يجسر أن يتعرف إليهم أو ينبلهم شيئاً ، وإذا وقع الاسم وقع الطلب فاتقوا الله وأمسكوا عن ذلك .

PART 1

Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā>>>>

‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī said: I and the Shaykh Abū ‘Amr [‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī] (RA)³¹ gathered at the place of Aḥmad b. Ishāq. Aḥmad b. Ishāq hinted (*ghamaza*) that I should ask him about the offspring (*khalaf*)³².

So I said to him "Oh Abū ‘Amr, I want to ask you about something, regarding which I am not doubtful; for my doctrine (*i‘tiqād*) and my faith is that the earth is never empty of an [Imam as] proof (*ḥujja*) except forty days before the day of judgment, and when that is the case, then the proof (*ḥujja*) is raised, and the door of repentance is closed, and no soul will benefit from its belief which did not believe before, nor gain reward from its belief. For [the Imams] are the sparks among God's creation (AJ), and they are the ones upon whom the Resurrection depends. Nonetheless, I would love to be increased in certainty. When Abraham (AS) asked his God (AJ) to show him how the dead are resurrected, He

³¹ Note that the formula *qaddasa allāh rūḥahu* (QAR), which is usually applied in Ibn Bābūya as the honorific formula proper to the Envoys in particular, is absent in this version, which uses instead the more generic *raḥimahu allāh* (RA), which is applied to many other venerable figures in reports and their *isnāds*.

³² *Khalaf* means both ‘successor’ and ‘offspring’.

said, "Do you not believe?" And [Abraham] said, "Indeed I do, but just to convince my heart."

PART 2

And Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad b. Ishāq reported to me from Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī, the Tenth Imam] (AS), he said: "I asked him and I said to him, "Who should I deal with, or from whom should I take and whose words should I accept."

And [al-Hādī] said to him "Al-ʿAmrī is my reliable one (*thiqa*), and what he delivers to you, he delivers that from me,³³ and what he says to you, he says from me, so listen to him, and obey, for he is the reliable, the trustworthy (*al-thiqa al-maʿmūn*)."

PART 3

And Abū ʿAlī [Aḥmad b. Ishāq] reported to me that he asked Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī, the Eleventh Imam] (AS) about the same thing, and he said to him "Al-ʿAmrī and his son are both trusted associates (*thiqa*), and what they deliver to you, they deliver from me, and what they say to you, they say from me. So listen to them, and obey them, for they are the two reliable, trustworthy ones (*al-thiqaṭān al-maʿmūnān*)."

And this is the speech of two Imams who passed amongst you.

PART 1, continued

[ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī] said: And Abū ʿAmr sank to the ground in prostration and wept, then he said, "Ask your request (*hāja*)."

³³ While the verb *addā*, to convey, deliver, discharge, fulfil, pay (Lane, 1:38) is used in the Qurʾān and in the legal literature in collocation with *zakāt* and also other canonical taxes like *kharāj*, here, however, it indicates an action on behalf of the Imam. This presumably refers to gifts and blessings that the Imams are mentioned as giving their followers.

And I said to him, "Have you seen the offspring after Abū Muḥammad [the Eleventh Imam] (AS)?"

And he said, "Yes by God! And his neck was like this!" And he indicated with his hands.

And I said to him, "One more [request] remains."

And he said to me, "Go ahead."

I said, "And the [child's] name?"

He said, "It is forbidden to you to ask about that, and I do not say this from myself, for it is not for me to make licit or forbid, but rather it is from him [the Imam] (AS). For the state of affairs, as far as the Sultan knows, is that Abū Muḥammad died and did not leave behind a son, and the inheritance was divided, and someone who had no right to it [Jaʿfar ʿthe Liarʿ] took it, and he is the one whose henchmen rove about [in search of the Imam] and no-one dares to acknowledge anything to them or to procure anything for them: and if the name drops, then the pursuit drops, so have reliance in God and keep away from that."³⁴

This composite hadith has been compiled out of three separate reports, perhaps by Kulaynī but more likely by ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī who played a central role in demonstrating the existence of the Hidden Imam. The first and last parts of this composite hadith form a framing report narrated by ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī in which Aḥmad b. Ishāq is depicted as catalyzing ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar’s question to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd about the existence of the Child Imam. Notably this framing report does not mention that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was involved in handling money, but focuses purely on his role as an eyewitness to the Child Imam. Secondly, embedded in this report are reports of two times when Aḥmad b. Ishāq claims to have witnessed

³⁴ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 329-330.

the Tenth and Eleventh Imams designating ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as the “reliable, the trustworthy” (*al-thiqa al-ma’mūn*). The latter of the two reports also designates the younger ‘Amrī, Abū Ja‘far in the same capacity. Crucially for later Shi‘a, these embedded reports appear to designate the ‘Amrīs as representatives for the Imams, giving them authority to deliver items and make statements on the Imam’s behalf.³⁵ This depiction, however, does not exist in the framing report. Thus, we can see two clear types presented here: ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as eyewitness to the existence of the Child Imam, and ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as *wakīl* commissioned to act on the Imam’s behalf. The existence of these two types in a combined redaction is telling: it suggests that this recension was produced in order to strengthen claims of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s Envoy-like status by combining reports which, by themselves did not indicate this status sufficiently clearly. In combining a report that articulates his status as entrusted *wakīl* with a report about his eyewitness account of the Hidden Imam, this redaction begins to approximate the image of the Envoy who is both in touch with the Hidden Imam, and also entrusted to act upon his behalf.

To supplement our understanding of Kulaynī’s report, we have other divergent versions of its component parts: both the report regarding ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as eyewitness; and the embedded report in which the ‘Amrīs are delegated to represent the Imam’s authority. Various reports show ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as eyewitness to the existence of the Child Imam, often reproducing the distinctive gesture to show the preternaturally well-developed size of the Child Imam’s neck³⁶ indicating his miraculous, prolific growth, in keeping with other prophetic and

³⁵ This appears to be the image that ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far and Kulaynī intend to present, though it must be recognized that such statements of trust are not at all unusual in the reports of earlier Imams, without this implying Envoy-like status. See, for example, Wardrop, “Lives,” 202, on the *thiqāt* among the followers of Jawād.

³⁶ See for example, Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 329-330; 331. See also Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 430-1, in which Abū Ja‘far recounts his father’s fulfilment of the Imam’s command to distribute prodigious quantities of bread and meat to celebrate the birth of the Child Imam. In another report, the same transmitter, ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far, transmits the eyewitness account from Abū Ja‘far, the younger ‘Amrī, rather than his father, suggesting either that there was a confusion

heroic Children who serve as archetypes for the Child Imam, like Abraham.³⁷ Ṭūsī transmits a version also from Aḥmad b. Ishāq via ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī. In this version, Aḥmad b. Ishāq gives additional justification for his request that the Imam appoint someone to stand as his deputy in his absence:

حدثنا أحمد بن إسحاق بن سعد القمي قال : دخلت على أبي الحسن علي بن محمد صلوات الله عليه في يوم من الأيام فقلت : يا سيدي أنا أغيب وأشهد ولا يتهبأ لي الوصول إليك إذا شهدت في كل وقت ، فقول من نقبل ؟ وأمر من نمتثل ؟ فقال لي صلوات الله عليه : هذا أبو عمرو الثقة الأمين ما قاله لكم فعني يقوله ، وما أداه إليكم فعني يؤديه . فلما مضى أبو الحسن عليه السلام وصلت إلى أبي محمد ابنه الحسن العسكري عليه السلام ذات يوم فقلت له عليه السلام مثل قولي لأبيه ، فقال لي : هذا أبو عمرو الثقة الأمين ثقة الماضي وثقتي في المحيا والممات ، فما قاله لكم فعني يقوله ، وما أدى إليكم فعني يؤديه

Aḥmad b. Ishāq b. Sa‘d al-Qummī said: I went in to Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad (AS) [al-Hādī] one day, and I said, "Oh my Sayyid I go away and then I turn up again without my visit to you being prepared. If I turn up at a moment’s notice, then whose words should we accept, and whose command should we imitate?"

And he said to me, (AS) "This is Abū ‘Amr [i.e. ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd], the reliable, the trustworthy (*al-thiqa al-ma’mūn*). What he says to you, he says it from me, and what he delivers to you he delivers that from me."

And when Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī] (AS) died, I visited his son, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (AS) the very same day, and I said to him (AS) the same thing I had said to his father. He replied, "This is Abū ‘Amr, the reliable, the trustworthy, of the deceased

about which ‘Amrī was involved, during the transmission history, in any case suffusing both father and son with the glow of authority provided by contact with the Hidden Child Imam. *Kamāl*, 435.

³⁷ Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, translation, 2: 50-60. See Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 137, for the prolific growth of the infant Abraham.

[Imam] and my reliable one (*thiqa*) regarding the living and the dead, and what he says to you, he says it from me, and what he delivers to you, he delivers it from me.”³⁸

This may be an earlier form of the two embedded reports we find in Kulaynī’s recension, as it seems to fit less well with the classical understanding of the lesser Occultation. Two key differences suggest that it is an earlier incarnation of the report: firstly, there is no mention of Abū Ja‘far. In addition, this report modifies the sense in which ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd appears to have been granted a commission to represent the Imam, pointing to a more circumscribed delegation of authority based on particular circumstances. Rather than suggesting a far-reaching delegation of authority which might be understood to extend into the era of Occultation, here the report suggests that Aḥmad b. Ishāq was a busy *wakīl*, going hither and thither on the Imam’s business, and likely to need to gain answers from the Imam promptly, whether or not the Imam was ready to receive him. Under these circumstances, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, the Imam’s trusted servant, is deputed to respond upon his behalf. This seems to undermine the use of this report as a potentially prophetic statement dictating protocol in the Occultation era, especially given the omission of Abū Ja‘far. This perhaps explains the existence of Kulaynī’s redacted version which, through omission, is more allusive of a fuller delegation of authority that might be seen to extend into Occultation era authority on behalf of the Child Imam. It should be noted that this kind of delegation of authority appears in reports from the Imams well before the time of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd.³⁹

Following the report above, Ṭūsī quotes an evocative editorial comment from ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī in reference to it: “We always used to mention that statement to each other

³⁸ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 220.

³⁹ For example, in one report, the Ninth Imam, Jawād is seen to delegate full authority to his *wakīl* to make decisions in the Imam’s name regarding the collection of money. See Wardrop, “Lives” 205-6.

and describe to each other the high station of Abū ‘Amr.” This appears to derive from a milieu in which post-Occultation actors in the community were trying to make sense of the new landscape in which ‘Amrī leadership had become, or was beginning to become a reality. It suggests, indeed, that Qummīs discussing these issues at a distance from Baghdad had little clear evidence upon which to base their understanding of the new era, and that they had to make do with scraps which suggested, rather than made explicit, the Imamic designation of ‘Amrī leadership.

The transmitters of these reports about the ‘Amrīs are central figures in the perpetuation of the idea of the Hidden Imam. We have already met Aḥmad b. Ishāq, and we will return to him. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī was one of the Qummī scholars who was most energetically engaged in making sense of the new era: as we see from his list of books in Najāshī’s *Rijāl*, he wrote a work entitled, “The Occultation and the Perplexity” (*al-Ghayba wa al-ḥayra*), and he is a key transmitter for hadiths from the younger ‘Amrī, Abū Ja‘far.⁴⁰

To sum up what we have learnt from these reports, though they were eventually used to establish the idea of the Safirate through Imamic designation, initially, they are more circumscribed to showing that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s represented the Tenth and Eleventh Imams *during their lifetimes*. The only role that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd appears to have had after the death of the Eleventh Imam was the mere transmission of an eyewitness account of the existence of the Child Imam. If we assume that ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far’s account has a historical basis, then it must have occurred at least a couple of years after the death of the Eleventh Imam, as it alludes to Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ having inherited the property of the Imam. As for Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, it is

⁴⁰ In addition, a similarly named Abū al-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī appears in one report in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl* in the guise of the interrogator of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’: a role which is very similar to that played by Aḥmad b. Ishāq in the reports analyzed at the end of the last chapter: “Then Abū al-‘Abbās Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī said, “Let us stay until this man [Ja‘far ‘the Liar’] returns and inspect his affairs (*amr*) properly.” *Kamāl*, 475-6.

likely that his name was added to the *thiqa* hadith at a later time in order to underscore his accession to authority in the Occultation era. By the time of Ṭūsī, Abū Ja‘far’s authority was uncontested, and so the existence of the probably earlier tradition in which his name was omitted was probably not perceived as problematic.

6.6.1 Significance of the epithet “*al-thiqa al-ma‘mūn*”

‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s epithet, “the reliable, the trustworthy” (*al-thiqa al-ma‘mūn*), can be understood in two senses. If we consider his initial function to have been a mere eyewitness to the existence of the Child Imam, then the epithet ‘reliable’ (*thiqa*) can be understood in keeping with the meaning of the overwhelming majority of instances in the later *Rijāl* works, in which *thiqa* refers to one’s reliability as a transmitter of reports. The word ‘trustworthy’ (*ma‘mūn*), can also be understood as a category to describe a transmitter, and is used in Kashshī several times in this sense.⁴¹ It certainly makes sense to understand the epithet, “the reliable, the trustworthy” as referring to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s status as a conveyer of reports, given that the truth of the accounts of the existence of the Hidden Imam depended upon him. He was, indeed, the best witness available to the Occultation faction. In one version of the *thiqa* hadith, ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī explicitly refers to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s excellence as a transmitter:

أنت الآن ممن لا يشك في قوله وصدقته فأسألك بحق الله وبحق الامامين اللذين وثقاك هل رأيت ابن أبي محمد الذي
هو صاحب الزمان عليه السلام

“You are now one of those about whose statements and truth there is no doubt, and I ask you, by God's truth and the truth of the two Imams who put their trust in you [i.e. al-Hādī

⁴¹ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 377; 407-10.

and al-‘Askarī], have you seen the son of Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī], who is the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*)?”⁴²

This places the emphasis squarely upon the epistemological role of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as a reliable eyewitness reporter.

However, as in Kulaynī’s version of the *thiqa* hadith, quoted above, the epithet “the reliable” is connected to his status as a *wakīl*; as a practical actor on behalf of the Imam. It is used in this sense in a Nuṣayrī report also quoted in Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba*, in which the Eleventh Imam calls ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd “the *wakīl* and the reliable, the one entrusted with God’s money” (*al-wakīl wa al-thiqa al-ma‘mūn ‘alā māl Allāh*).⁴³ However, clearly the two senses of “*al-thiqa al-ma‘mūn*” are bound together in the context of the *wikāla* network, for *wakīls* claimed both to be transmitters of the words of the Imam, and also to be trustworthy recipients of the money due to the Imam. Whatever the initial meaning of the epithet, the relevance of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s status as *thiqa* was gradually inflated to be understood as an implicit designation of leadership. This process which started with ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī’s recension of the composite hadith regarding ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as an eyewitness to the Child Imam that appears in Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*, reached its culmination with the canonical narrative of the Four Envoys in Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba*, in which ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd is introduced using a derivation of *thiqa*, as the “entrusted Shaykh” (*al-shaykh al-mawthūq bihi*).⁴⁴

6.6.2 The question of handwriting

Handwriting appears as an important trope in the evidentiary mechanisms of the early Occultation era, and even before the Occultation era. Aḥmad b. Ishāq is particularly associated

⁴² Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 220.

⁴³ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 221. See also the version in Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 393. I quote this report in full below.

⁴⁴ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 219-20.

with this interest in handwriting as providing documentary evidence for a claim. The invocation of handwriting as evidence continues to recur from before the death of the Eleventh Imam well into the Occultation period, though it proves inconclusive evidence for us, beyond the suggestion that documents were indeed used and scrutinized to verify claims, and that therefore the quotation of documents like notes and rescripts should be taken seriously.

Aḥmad b. Ishāq appears in a number of reports that highlight handwriting, the first of which occurs during the lifetime of Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī:

محمد بن يحيى ، عن أحمد بن إسحاق قال : دخلت على أبي محمد عليه السلام فسألته أن يكتب لأتظر إلى خطه فأعرفه إذا ورد ، فقال : نعم ، ثم قال : يا أحمد إن الخط سيختلف عليك من بين القلم الغليظ إلى القلم الدقيق فلا تشكن

Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā>>>

Aḥmad b. Ishāq: I wrote to Abū Muḥammad [‘Askarī] and I asked him to write so that I might see his handwriting and know it if it arrived (*idhā warada*) and he said, “Yes.”

Then he said “Oh Ishāq, handwriting will differ for you between a coarse pen and a fine pen, but do not doubt!”⁴⁵

This report seems to anticipate the embarrassment of the era of perplexity, suggesting perhaps that there will be doubt about whether communications from al-‘Askarī are authentic. This report may perhaps be related to the group who claimed that the Imamate had stopped at al-‘Askarī himself and that he had gone into Occultation. There are however other reports in which Aḥmad b. Ishāq uses al-‘Askarī’s handwriting as a means of verifying communication from the Hidden Child Imam, including a family report transmitted from Aḥmad b. Ishāq by his grandson.⁴⁶ In

⁴⁵ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:513-14.

⁴⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 433-4. See this report quoted in full below.

this report, then, the handwriting of the Eleventh Imam serves as a proof of the existence of a Child Imam. These two reports provide rather ambivalent evidence, from which it is hard to draw conclusions, beyond the fact that the name of Aḥmad b. Ishāq was connected with evidentiary claims based on the transmission of written documents from the era of the Eleventh Imam. In this case, it is based upon written evidence from the Eleventh Imam. This report fits into the doctrine that was the distinctive sticking point of the early Twelvers: that the Child Imam was born *before* the death of al-‘Askarī, in contradiction and defense against the reports of the phantom pregnancy.

Again, then, Aḥmad b. Ishāq appears in the early Occultation literature as a central intermediary for the early establishment of the idea of the Child Imam. During the Occultation era, there are numerous more citations of handwriting related to the Envoy Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, which we will address in the following chapter.

6.7 The testimony of Aḥmad b. Ishāq and ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī

We will now turn to consider transmission history of the narratives of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd. Our sources for the early Occultation era are very dominantly Qummī in origin and transmission. This means that we must presume a certain Qummī bias in the sources, which is not even escaped in the versions of Khaṣībī, who, though he presents a more Kufan and Iraqi perspective, still relies heavily on the Qummīs who were instrumental in furthering the doctrine of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam in its earliest stages. As we have seen in our discussion of the failure of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ in the previous chapter, his rejection by Qummī delegates was crucial in his overall failure. Several versions of this Qummī rejection of Ja‘far the liar exist. Aḥmad b. Ishāq is remembered in the Qummī sources as both instrumental to this rejection of Ja‘far, *and* as a crucial link in the chains of transmission giving witness to the Child Imam. These two facts

suggest that Aḥmad b. Ishāq was a central figure in propagating the idea of the Child Imam and the Occultation as guiding principles in the new era. Aḥmad b. Ishāq also appears to have been an important figure in the community, credited by Ibn Rustum in the 5th/11th century as having been a *bāb*-like figure, and *wakīl* of the Hidden Imam in the earliest phase of the Occultation, as we saw in Chapter 5.

There are a number of difficulties with the testimony of Aḥmad b. Ishāq. Firstly, regarding Aḥmad b. Ishāq as witness to the existence of the Child Imam, as we have seen in the *thiqa* hadith quoted above from Kulaynī's *Kāfī*, Aḥmad b. Ishāq is recorded as *not* having seen the Imam himself, but rather as connecting 'Abd Allāh b. Ja'far al-Ḥimyarī with an eyewitness in the form of 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd. A generation later, by the time of Ibn Bābūya, the reports regarding Aḥmad b. Ishāq's role had progressed, such that he is depicted as being an epistolary witness to the birth of the Child Imam, having received the following from the Eleventh Imam:

حدثنا أحمد بن الحسن بن إسحاق القمي قال : لما ولد الخلف الصالح عليه السلام ورد عن مولانا أبي محمد الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام إلى جدي أحمد بن - إسحاق كتاب فإذا فيه مكتوب بخط يده عليه السلام الذي كان ترد به التوقيعات عليه ، وفيه " ولد لنا مولود فليكن عندك مستورا وعن جميع الناس مكتوما ، فإننا لم نظهر عليه إلا الأقرب لقرابته والولي لولايته أحببنا إعلامك ليسرك الله به ، مثل ما سرنا به ، والسلام.

Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Ishāq al-Qummī said: When the righteous offspring (*al-khalaf al-ṣāliḥ*) was born (AS) a letter appeared from Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī ['Askarī] (AS) to my grandfather Aḥmad b. Ishāq, and in it was [the Imam's] handwriting in which he used to respond to the rescripts (*tawqī'āt*): "A child is born to us, but let him remain concealed with you, hidden away from the majority of people (*fa-l-yakun 'indaka mastūran wa 'an jam' al-nās maktūman*). For we will not show him except to the closest of his close companions due to his closeness, and the close follower, due to his

acknowledgement of his master (*walāya*). We have preferred to inform you in order that God might make you happy through that, just as he has made us happy through it.

Peace.⁴⁷

This report tends to contradict the report in Kulaynī in which Aḥmad b. Ishāq is reliant upon ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as a witness to the existence of the Child Imam. Instead, here, it is Aḥmad, himself, who gains evidence through his correspondence with the Eleventh Imam. This report was transmitted by Aḥmad b. Ishāq’s grandson, Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan, suggesting that the family preserved reports that were favorable to their ancestor, depicting him as picked out for special attention by the Eleventh and Twelfth Imams. Indeed, beyond merely being a passive eyewitness, Aḥmad b. Ishāq here appears to take a personal role in keeping the Child Imam hidden. This corroborates the testimony of the *Dalā’il* in which Aḥmad b. Ishāq appears as the *bāb* and *wakīl* of the Hidden Imam, until he dies, and when he died, the Imam went fully into Occultation.⁴⁸ Ṭūsī also states that Aḥmad b. Ishāq had seen the Imam.⁴⁹ Thus, there seems to have been a steady inflation of the strength of Aḥmad b. Ishāq as a witness, who, according to Kulaynī did not claim to have seen the Child Imam at all, and who, notably did not write any works about the Hidden Imam, or the Occultation. Instead Aḥmad b. Ishāq wrote works of juridical relevance, and also a collection of the statements of the Tenth Imam, though nothing, apparently from the Eleventh or Twelfth Imams.⁵⁰

Given that Aḥmad b. Ishāq did not write anything about the Hidden Imam, we may be skeptical about the extent to which he was really involved in actively broadcasting the existence

⁴⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 433-4.

⁴⁸ Ibn Rustum al-Tabari, *Dalā’il*, 503. See the quotation of this passage in Chapter 5.

⁴⁹ Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 70. Najāshī does not make this claim.

⁵⁰ Najāshī mentions *The [Legal] Reasons for Fasting*, (*‘Ilal al-ṣawm*) and *The Questions of the Men to Abū al-Ḥasan the Third [al-Hādī]* (*Masā’il al-rijāl li-abī al-Ḥasan al-thālith [al-Hādī]*) which Aḥmad b. Ishāq assembled. Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 91. Ṭūsī has much the same details, with slightly different book titles, *Fihrist*, 70.

of the Hidden Imam and ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd. Instead, our attention is drawn to ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī who appears a far more likely candidate to have been involved with spreading news of the Occultation. Aḥmad b. Ishāq’s eyewitness accounts were transmitted by ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, who was an important figure in the consolidation and transmission of Occultation ideas. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī was also clearly concerned with the preservation of Imamic knowledge in the form of collections of the *responsa* of various Imams from Hādī until the Hidden Imam. Thus Najāshī lists among his works, *The Questions of the Men and their Correspondence with Abū al-Ḥasan the Third [al-Hādī]*, (*Masā’il al-rijāl wa mukātibātuhum abā al-ḥasan al-thālith [al-Hādī]*), and, as we have mentioned, *The Responsa of Abū Muḥammad and the Rescripts (Masā’il Abī Muḥammad wa al-tawqī‘āt)*, or as Ṭūsī calls it, *The Responsa of Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan [al-‘Askarī] by the Hand of Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī (Masā’il li-abī Muḥammad al-Ḥasan [al-‘Askarī] (AS) ‘alā yad Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī)* and a collection of reports about the Hidden Imam called also *The Book of the Shortest Chain of Transmission to the Lord of the Age, (Kitāb qurb al-isnād ilā ṣāhib al-amr)* (AS). Najāshī mentions that he composed a book called *The Book of Occultation and Perplexity (Kitāb al-ghayba wa al-ḥayra)*. Ṭūsī adds, in his *Fihrist*, the title of a work, which may be the same as this one mentioned by Najāshī, which Ṭūsī calls *The Book of the Interlude [between Imams] and the Perplexity (Kitāb al-fatra wa al-ḥayra)*⁵¹ which tantalizingly suggests that ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far was engaged somehow in the debate about whether there could be a pause in the succession of Imams. If he took a position that was inconsistent with later orthodoxy, it would explain why his works do not survive, though his reports regarding the Occultation have been

⁵¹ Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 219; Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 167.

preserved. One of ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far’s works which still survives is his *Qurb al-isnād*,⁵² so called as it compiles a set of reports that include the shortest possible chains of transmission from the compiler to the Imam. The extant work includes reports going back to Imam Riḍā though tantalizingly, he also apparently compiled a work entitled *Kitāb qurb al-isnād ilā ṣāhib al-amr*, which suggests that it was a collection of the statements of the Hidden Imam.

Thus we may say that ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far was a significant figure in the propagation of the idea of the Occultation and the Hidden Imam, including what may have been the earliest works on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam. Much of what ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far knew about the Occultation was transmitted to his fellow Qummī, Ibn Bābūya, whose *Kamāl* relies heavily upon narratives that include ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far in their chains of transmission for both accounts of the Occultation and also for information about the life and activities of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī.

Clearly then, though Aḥmad b. Ishāq was an important figure, a companion of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams, there are some problems with his testimony which appears to have been tampered from being a transmitter of eyewitness accounts from ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, or perhaps an epistolary witness using the evidence of a letter from the Eleventh Imam, he was eventually cast as an eyewitness, and even *bāb* to the Child Imam. While it is very possible that Aḥmad b. Ishāq had some involvement in spreading news about either the Child Imam or ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, it is also possible that he was just a conveniently prominent figure about whom reports existed which could be repurposed to suggest his direct involvement in the Occultation story. Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that he was indeed a central figure in the Occultation period, but it merely indicates that the kind of authority he held is obscure. Given his list of works, it is

⁵² ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, *Qurb al-isnād* (Qumm: Mu‘assasat āl al-bayt ‘alayhim al-salām li-ihyā’ al-turāth, 1413 H [1992-3]).

perhaps likely that Aḥmad b. Ishāq represented the case of the *nāḥiya* by preserving and maintaining the legacy of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams, answering juristic questions and asserting continuity in the face of Perplexity. Such an assertion of continuity would have allowed the Occultation faction to develop and provided a foundation for the later elaboration of his legacy as a prominent member of the old guard during the earliest phase of the Occultation.

While the role of Aḥmad b. Ishāq in fostering the Occultation idea is obscure, however, ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, judging by his list of works, can be more safely credited with playing an active role in broadcasting the Occultation reports. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, died some time after he visited Kufa, after 290/303 as Najāshī notes, and he transmitted hadith to the people of Kufa, and they spread them around.⁵³ Again, this seems to suggest a pivotal role in the transmission and circulation of reports about the Occultation. ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far’s transmission of reports to Kufa may indicate how the Qummī hadiths about the Occultation came to be so prominent even in the Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya*, which tends otherwise to be situated more in the Kufan intellectual milieu. Khaṣībī does mention ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī among the people he transmitted reports from,⁵⁴ although, however, his name does not appear prominently among the narrative reports about the early Occultation. If, as the testimony of Aḥmad b. Ishāq and ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far suggests, the initial generation and propagation of reports about the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam was a process dominated by Qummī traditionists and *wakīls*, then it would make sense that after a few decades of incubation, these reports should be transmitted to Kufa and elsewhere by a prominent Qummī traditionist such as ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī.

⁵³ Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 219.

⁵⁴ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 263-4.

As we know that ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, travelled to Kufa to transmit reports around 290/303 as Najāshī notes, we also have a suggestion of the timeline for the beginnings of the active propagation of the Occultation idea, following a couple of decades of Perplexity in which there must have been intensive discussion and contestation of ideas, but perhaps little in the way of crystallized doctrine-formation and pantheon formation for the new era. Given that ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far also transmitted *Responsa* on the authority of Abū Ja‘far we may associate such pro-Occultation propaganda activities with the rise of Abū Ja‘far following the rupture caused by the deaths of the old guard. Thus this date of 290/303 associated with the life and activities of ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far gives us further confirmation of the chronology suggested by Abū Sahl’s *Tanbīh*.

6.8 ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as *bāb* to the Eleventh Imam, and Nuṣayrī anxiety about his role

Apart from the various versions of the *thiqa* hadith analyzed above, it is the reports preserved by the Nuṣayrī, Khaṣībī which give us most detail in depicting the image of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as *wakīl* of the Eleventh Imam. I have mentioned the possibility that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd should perhaps be understood as a household servant of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams, fitting into the literary trope of servant witnesses to the birth of the Child Imam. In this context, the comparison with Badr the Eunuch, who was addressed in the previous chapter, is illuminating. Badr appears in the *Hidāya* of the Nuṣayrī scholar Khaṣībī in the role of a powerful intermediary who speaks on behalf of the Imam. If we understand ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd to have been a servant in the same sense as Badr, then the literary claims made on behalf of Badr and ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd suddenly jump into stark relief, for they both fulfil a similar archetype. Indeed, not only are they rivals for the position of servant and intermediary to the Imam in the literature, but we even have

a report in the *Hidāya*, quoted also in Tūsī's *Ghayba*,⁵⁵ in which Badr and 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd appear in the same narrative as something approaching rivals for the Imam's favor:

محمد بن اسماعيل و علي بن عبد الله الحسنان قالوا مدخلنا على أبي محمد (ع) وهو بسر من رأى وبين يديه جماعة من أوليائه وشيعته حتى دخل عليه بدر خادمه فقال : يا مولاي بالباب قوم شعث غير ، فقال: نعم هؤلاء قوم من شيعتنا باليمن وهم... قال بدر يا مولاي هم أكثر من هذا العدد . فقال ويلك يا بدر أولئك خدامهم فامض وأت بعثمان بن سعيد العمري .

Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl and 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh, the two Ḥasanīs⁵⁶ both said: We went in to Abū Muḥammad ['Askarī], who was at Samarra and in his presence was a group of his followers and his Shi'a, when Badr his eunuch (*khādim*) entered to him and said, "Oh my Lord, there is a group of people at the door, covered in dust and disheveled."

[The Imam] said, "Yes, those are a group of people from our Shi'a in Yemen, and they are ... [and he names the names of the faithful from Yemen]."

Badr said, "Oh my Master (*mawlā*) they are more than that number."

And he said, "Woe upon you, oh Badr! Those are their servants, so go and bring 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd al-'Amrī."⁵⁷

In contrast to Badr, 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd does not doubt the miraculous knowledge of the Imam, but instead he seems to participate in it, and the Imam is seen to name 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd directly as his *wakīl*, saying,

امض يا عثمان ، فإنك الوكيل والثقة المأمون على مال الله ، واقبض من هؤلاء النفر اليمينيين ما حملوه من المال

⁵⁵ Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 221.

⁵⁶ Reading from Tūsī's "*al-ḥasaniyayn*", rather than Khaṣībī's "*al-Ḥasanān*." This may indicate that they are brothers, descendants of someone called al-Ḥasan, or else that they are from the lineage of al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī.

⁵⁷ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 392-3.

“Go, oh ‘Uthmān, for you are the *wakīl* entrusted with the money of God and the Shi‘a (*fa-innaka al-wakīl al-thiqa al-ma‘mūn ‘alā māl allāh wa al-shī‘a*),”⁵⁸ and take from those Yemeni⁵⁹ people the money they brought.⁶⁰

In this report, Badr’s position is being explicitly subordinated to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd. This is, perhaps, a narrative riposte to other reports mentioned in the *Hidāya* in which Badr’s role is that of an extremely powerful intermediary to the Child Imam.

Notably the phrase *al-thiqa al-ma‘mūn* as used in this report, makes explicit the kind of trust which was placed in ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd. Here, the word “the trustworthy” (*al-ma‘mūn*) is made the head of an adjective phrase, indicating that, rather than just being generally trustworthy he has a particular commission to handle the canonical taxes. And sure enough, in the continuation of this report, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd is depicted as collecting large sums of money from the Yemeni pilgrims. This depiction of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as “trustworthy” in the sense of the one commissioned to collect money, corroborates the sense that we see in Kashshī’s reports,⁶¹ in which he is appointed to handle all the money of the various regions, and the phrase in his biography that he “had a well-known commission.”⁶²

The intention to depict ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd explicitly as primarily responsible for collecting money in the Imam’s name, appears to be a distinctively Nuṣayrī preoccupation, and though there is a version of this same report in Tūsī’s *Ghayba*, it is notable that this report’s *isnād* makes it explicit that Tūsī got the report via Ibn Barniyya, but ultimately from Khaṣībī himself.⁶³ The

⁵⁸ Tūsī omits the phrase “and his Shi‘a.”

⁵⁹ Reading with Tūsī, “*al-yamanīyīn*,” instead of “*al-thamāniya*.”

⁶⁰ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 393.

⁶¹ See above.

⁶² Tūsī, *Rijāl*, 390.

⁶³ Khaṣībī’s name is misquoted as “al-Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad al-Khaṣībī,” but it is clearly the same man, with the same informants. The report reached Tūsī via Ibn Barniyya. Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 221.

Nuṣayrīs (or proto-Nuṣayrīs) appear to have had very pressing doctrinal motivations to emphasize ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s mundane fiscal authority, so as to set his role apart from the authority of their own *bāb*, Ibn Nuṣayr, who was also a follower of the Eleventh Imam. In another report in Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya*, the idea of a *wakīl* mediating for the Imam is seen as a direct challenge to the spiritual mediation of the *bāb*-hood of Ibn Nuṣayr:

لما نصب سيدنا أبو محمد الحسن بن علي (ع) أبا عمر (و) عثمان بن سعيد العمري وكيلاً وقعت الشبهة في قلوبنا
وقلنا عسى أن يكون قد بدا لله في محمد بن نصير كما بدا له في أبي الخطاب محمد بن أبي زينب

When Our Sayyid Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b ‘Alī [al-‘Askarī] appointed Abū ‘Amr ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī as a *wakīl*, doubt fell in our hearts and we said, “It is hard that God has changed his mind regarding Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr as he changed his mind regarding Abū al-Khaṭṭāb Muḥammad b. Abī Zaynab.”⁶⁴

In what follows, a group of believers gather and ask al-‘Askarī the meaning of this appointment. He settles their anxieties with Imamic wisdom:

أبو محمد (ع) قال لنا: هل علم أحد منكم أو نقل إليه أن سامان كان وكيلاً على مال أمير المؤمنين؟
قلنا: لا يا سيدنا.

قال: أفليس قد علمتم و نقل إليكم أنه كان بابه؟

فقلنا : بلى.

فقال: فلما الذي أنكرتم أن يكون محمد بن نصير بابي و عثمان بن سعيد وكيلي؟

⁶⁴ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 394.

Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] (AS) ... said to us, "Does any one of you know or has received a report that Salmān was the *wakīl* in charge of the money of the Commander of the Faithful [‘Alī]?"

And we said, "No! oh our Sayyid!"

He said, "So then does any of you know or has received a report that he was his *bāb*?"

And we said, "Indeed we have!"

He said, "So for what reason have you denied that Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr could be my *bāb* and ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd my *wakīl*!?"⁶⁵

Here, then, the Nuṣayrī transmitter seeks to establish a separation between the charismatic spiritual authority of the Nuṣayrī line of *bābs*, and the purely fiscal authority of the *wakīls*. Thus those followers of the Imams who already accepted the spiritual mediation of a charismatic *bāb* into their cosmology were concerned that the establishment of *wakīls* as representatives of the Imams would disturb this cosmology, as they contested the same position. In making a clear theoretical separation between the Nuṣayrī *bābs* and the fiscal *wakīls*, the Nuṣayrīs, or proto-Nuṣayrīs, were able to accept the *de facto* political developments that resulted in the leadership of the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*, and particularly the ‘Amrīs, while ring-fencing the particular spiritual authority and mediation of Ibn Nuṣayr and the pantheon of earlier *bābs*.⁶⁶

The canonical Twelver reports transmitted by ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, which appear in Kulaynī, Ibn Bābūya and Ṭūsī are more limited in their depiction of the activities of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, and less explicit in describing his role as preeminent *wakīl* to the Imams than

⁶⁵ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 394-5.

⁶⁶ While the *Hidāya* remains undated, all of this suggests that these Nuṣayrī reports developed in response to the development of the authority of Abū Ja‘far, and the gradual canonization of his authority through recourse to the establishment of his father’s reputation, some years into the Occultation, and therefore probably date from after the earliest stratum of Twelver reports to be found in Kulaynī and Kashshī, which appear less affected by the conception of Abū Ja‘far as Envoy.

those transmitted by the Nuṣayrī Khaṣībī. This is very important. Though it is possible that the reports in the *Hidāya* are just later, representing a later stage in the canonization of the idea of the *wakīls*, it may, on the other hand, suggest that Nuṣayrīs or proto-Nuṣayrīs were particularly concerned in delimiting the theological role of the preeminent *wakīls*, or Envoys – in particular the ‘Amrīs – and began to generate a literature upon them that did not exist among other Twelver groups. Once this literature had been generated it might have painlessly been adopted by other Twelvers, as, for example in Ibn Barniyya’s adoption of the above report from Khaṣībī.

We can see explicitly expressed in these reports a reason both why Nuṣayrīs might embrace the office of a preeminent *wakīl*, but also why they were particularly anxious to delimit this office. Firstly, the proto-Nuṣayrī *ghulāt* cosmology was intimately connected to the kind of delegation of authority or transmission of sacredness implied in the Imam’s appointment of a special representative. Secondly, the existence of such a representative implicitly challenged their own pantheon of *bābs* who claimed to speak on behalf of the Imams, and thus it was in their particular interest to develop explicit theoretical and terminological distinctions to delimit the authority the *wakīls*.

Another work which shows some similarities with Khaṣībī’s pantheon-making perspective, and in which ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd appears explicitly as a *bāb*, is Ibn Rustum’s *Dalā’il al-imāma*. Though this is a later source, it appears to preserve various apparently early divergences from the canonical Twelver narratives. The *Dalā’il* is so structured that, for each Imam, Ibn Rustum lists a *bāb* (though he idiosyncratically spells it *bawwāb*, meaning doorkeeper, perhaps due to a later desire to suppress the *ghulāt* resonances of the word *bāb*). The tension between Ibn Nuṣayr and ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd is again made explicit in the fact that, for the Eleventh Imam, Ibn Rustum lists both ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd *and* Ibn Nuṣayr, though he adds

afterwards that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd is “more correct (*aṣaḥḥ*).”⁶⁷ This shows that there were clearly two sides to the debate regarding the *bāb* to the Eleventh Imam, one side who argued it was Ibn Nuṣayr, and another who argued it was ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, though a more detailed reading of the *Dalā’il* would be necessary to determine exactly what meanings *bāb*-hood had for Ibn Rustum and his sources.

While the *Hidāya* remains undated, all of this suggests that these Nuṣayrī reports developed first in response to the apparent contradiction in the roles of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd and Ibn Nuṣayr as prominent followers of the Eleventh Imam, imbued with his authority. It is likely that this occurred during the lifetime of these men, or perhaps soon after. Ibn Nuṣayr died sometime after 868, and, Friedman suggests, “it was seemingly only after Ebn Nuṣayr’s death and his sanctification as *Bāb Allāh*... that the *bāb* became clearly the third inferior aspect of the divinity, which serves as mediator between the divine and the human.”⁶⁸ This suggests that the articulation of the role of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd among proto-Nuṣayrīs developed in the context of the articulation of the role of Ibn Nuṣayr himself, in the years after the death of the Eleventh Imam.

There seems to have been some kind of an open split with the gnostic supporters of the Occultation-faction, however, as first Abū Ja‘far, and then Ibn Rawḥ in 312/924, issued statements cursing Ibn Nuṣayr along with other renegades such as al-Sharī‘ī and Ibn Rawḥ’s erstwhile assistant al-Shalmaghānī.⁶⁹ We may, perhaps be skeptical about how active Abū Ja‘far was in this cursing, as the text of the rescript does not survive, and Ibn Barniyya, who mentions this confuses the place of the elder and the younger ‘Amrīs, saying,

⁶⁷ Ibn Rustum, *Dalā’il*, 425.

⁶⁸ Yaron Friedman, “Ebn Nuṣayr,” *EIr*. However, we should add that even though the Nuṣayrī conception of Ibn Nuṣayr as *bāb* may have been under development, the general gnostic conception of *bāb* was had already been established before this time.

⁶⁹ See Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 247; 256-7.

كان محمد بن نصير النميري من أصحاب أبي محمد الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام فلما توفي أبو محمد ادعى مقام أبي جعفر محمد بن عثمان أنه صاحب إمام الزمان وادعى (له) البابية ، وفضحه الله تعالى بما ظهر منه من الالحاد والجهل ، ولعن أبي جعفر محمد بن عثمان له ، وتبريه منه ، واحتجابه عنه ، وادعى ذلك الامر بعد الشريعي

Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr al-Namīrī was one of the companions of Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] (AS) and when Abū Muḥammad died, [Ibn Nuṣayr] claimed the place of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān, saying that he was the companion (*ṣāhib*) of the Imam of the Age (*imam al-zamān*), and he claimed to be his *bāb* and God (T) abhorred him for what he manifested in the way of irreligion (*ilhād*) and ignorance (*jahl*) and Abū Ja‘far cursed him and disassociated from him.⁷⁰

This statement displays patent confusion between the role of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as primary *wakīl* of the Eleventh Imam, a role which is clear in the reports in the *Hidāya* and Kashshī’s *Rijāl*, and the later role of Abū Ja‘far as also the companion of the Eleventh Imam, fostered by later canonizing accounts of the Four Envoys. This may suggest that the cursing, also is misattributed, and we may speculate that the attack on the Nuṣayrīs and other gnostics came to a head more fully from the period of Ibn Rawḥ.

Even so, the *Hidāya* indicates that, at some point, the Four Envoys were accepted as canonical by the Nuṣayrīs, though it may be argued that this was only through *taqiyya*. That being said, gnostics like the Nuṣayrīs were well able to accept the *de facto* power structures of their community and incorporate them into their cosmologies and pantheons, in spite of inconveniences like the issuing of ostracisms and cursings.

⁷⁰ Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 247.

All this leads me to suggest that, given the focus of the proto-Nuṣayrī reports on the tension between the roles of Ibn Nuṣayr and ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, followed by the gradual canonization of Abū Ja‘far’s authority through recourse to the glorification of his father ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s reputation, some years into the Occultation era, we may date these reports to around the same time as the earliest stratum of Twelver reports to be found in Kulaynī and Kashshī, which also appear less affected by the conception of Abū Ja‘far as Envoy. It is hard to be more precise, but given that ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī visited Kufa after 290/903, and died sometime afterward then it is likely that Khaṣībī’s reports about ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as *wakīl* coalesced before this, but were added to the Twelver canon in the years that followed, not being adopted by Qummī and Rāzī traditionists until after the death of Kulaynī.

As ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s role was soon written into the literature of the Occultation era, this role appears then to have been subjected to a theological renegotiation which led to a number of outcomes, including the increasing subordination of all other figures, both literary and historical, who had been associated with claims to special status generated in the earliest years of the Occultation. It is likely that this renegotiation took place under the coalescing unity which increasingly emphasized adherence to the idea of the Child Imam, and the recognition of the authority ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s son, Abū Ja‘far.

6.9 Summing up the role of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd

In assessing the role of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, both as a literary character in the drama of the Hidden Imam, and as a historical figure, we face the obstacles that we have no precise dates for any of the aspects of his life; and his role in the sources continually evolved. In spite of this difficulty, however, the balance of evidence suggests that he was overwhelmingly a figure of the pre-Occultation era, and very probably was the preeminent *wakīl* for the Eleventh Imam, thus,

perhaps, furnishing an archetype that would be remembered and imitated during the Occultation era. In addition, the reports of Aḥmad b. Ishāq and ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī suggest that he survived at least long enough to be considered a viable witness to the existence of the Child Imam and to pass down his testimony in the period of Occultation. However, the fact that this testimony is limited to these two transmitters, plus ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s son, Abū Ja‘far, means that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s role as eyewitness may not have originated with ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd himself, but instead he may simply have been a convenient figure to associate it with. Certainly, these two Qummīs were instrumental in propagating the image of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as the central eyewitness to the Child Imam, and as a particularly reliable witness, so attested by two Imams, and thereby supporting the claims of their ally, Abū Ja‘far.

As for the reports that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was a *wakīl*, these never describe his activities during the Occultation era, but only ever refer to his activities during the lives of the Imams: in particular the life of Imam al-‘Askarī. The Nuṣayrī reports are particularly rich in depictions of his activity as a *wakīl* for al-‘Askarī, and are at pains to point out that this did not displace Ibn Nuṣayr as the *bāb* for the Imam. It is probable that these Nuṣayrī reports were generated in response to the growing consensus surrounding the Twelver synthesis in the early-mid fourth/tenth century, at a time when Ibn Nuṣayr’s role was also being formulated and written into doctrine. At some point, the reports that depicted ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as a *wakīl* were combined, apparently by ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī, presumably with a view to providing a justification for the increasing importance of his father, Abū Ja‘far, from whom ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far transmitted *tawqī‘āt*. This combination of the role of eyewitness and the role of the *wakīl* must have been very suggestive in the construction of the image of the Envoy, suggesting that there was a precedent for Abū Ja‘far’s role of intermediary to the Hidden Imam, which combined

the epistemological support for the existence of the Child Imam with the institutional functions of Imamate vested in the *wikāla* network. In dating these developments we can observe that in a report about ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s death, and the transmission of his authority to Abū Ja‘far is said to take place in 280/893,⁷¹ suggesting that his death must have occurred some time earlier. When discussing the authority of Abū Ja‘far, the sources very commonly state that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd was the *wakīl* of the Eleventh Imam, and that Abū Ja‘far was the *wakīl* of the *nāḥiya*, or the *wakīl* of the Hidden Imam, suggesting that his death took place only a very few years after the death of the Eleventh Imam.

In the following chapters, we will continue to consider ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd in relation to the claims of his son, Abū Ja‘far, to preeminent authority in the Imami community. For now, suffice it to say that ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd played a double role in the epistemological foundations of the new Twelver synthesis: affirming the existence of the Hidden Imam, and providing the Occultation-era *nāḥiya* with an unbroken link to the authority of the living, manifest Imams. Of course, it is partly due to the efforts of his son, Abū Ja‘far, that his role as an eyewitness was preserved, but before Abū Ja‘far rose to preeminent authority, there was a period in which other *wakīls* exercised authority and attempted to hold the central institutions of Imamate together through the period of perplexity that followed al-‘Askarī’s death.

⁷¹ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225.

Chapter 7: Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī the Envoy

7.1 Overview

While the earliest phase of the Occultation era was characterized by numerous claims to authority which have left definite traces in the surviving sources, it is difficult to untangle the historical progression of events due to the contradictions in these sources, and the evidence of successive redactions of the stories they contain. However, the Twelver sources eventually converge upon the consensus that Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī held particularly prominent authority sometime after the death of the Eleventh Imam. He was never unopposed. He faced rivals among the *wakīls* and beyond, but by the time of his death in 305/917, the idea of Envoy appears to have been established in his image, to the extent that there was an office that was sufficiently established and recognized to give rise to a process of succession. With the example of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, and the establishment of the idea of Envoy, the stories of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, Ḥājiz, and the other early *wakīls* came to be reassessed, and the preserved memories of the community shifted accordingly as a canonical narrative crystallized.

In this chapter we will assess the rise and tenure of Abū Ja‘far, how he came to achieve prominence, the establishment of the office of Envoy, and the effects of his legacy. As we have seen, Klemm has argued that neither of the ‘Amrīs truly occupied the position of Envoy, but that the idea of Envoy may have been “concocted” by the circle of Ibn Rawḥ, the ‘Third Envoy’ of the canonical sequence.¹ In a sense, of course, every generation ‘concocts’ its version of the past, and so the Nawbakhtīs and their generation could not help but produce their own conception about the *de facto* developments that had taken place in the community. However, as we have

¹ See Chapter 1.

seen in the previous chapters, there is a rich supply of reports which suggest that the production of the role of Envoy was a gradual process from the moment the Eleventh Imam died in 260/874, though based on pre-Occultation archetypes of the *wakīls* and the *bābs*, until the time of Ibn Rawḥ and after, when centralized political authority in the Imami community finally expired a few years after the death of Ibn Rawḥ. Within this timeline, the sources do clearly suggest a prominent role for ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd’s son, Abū Ja‘far, who appears in many narrative reports as having a leadership role, collecting money, and issuing key statements of doctrinal and political policy. In this, he appears to have been following primarily in the footsteps of Ḥājiz, a member of the old guard, rather than his father or any Nawbakhtī.

On the basis of our sources we may suggest that Abū Ja‘far’s major achievement was his reassertion of the continuity of the *nāḥiya* structure of intermediaries after the rupture created by the deaths of the old guard of the Eleventh Imam. He asserted this continuity by broadcasting the existence of the Hidden Imam through the dissemination of reports about him, and rescripts in his name, and by maintaining the institutional framework of the Imam’s fiscal network, attempting to continue with tax-collection, though he appears to have been forced into giving concessions and dispensations which meant that centralized tax-collection was continued only on a reduced scale.

7.2 Sources for Abū Ja‘far’s Life

Abū Ja‘far must have been a member of the younger generation. He traced his authority back to his father, not to the Eleventh Imam, in spite of later versions of the *thiqa* hadith in which the Eleventh Imam is made to canonize him. The obscurity that dogs the family origins of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd of course also dogs the origins of Abū Ja‘far. Ṭūsī’s biography of him provides little information:

محمد بن عثمان بن سعيد العمري ، يكنى أبا جعفر ، وأبوه يكنى أبا عمرو ، جميعا وكيلان من جهة صاحب الزمان عليه السلام ، ولهما منزلة جلييلة عند الطائفة.

Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī, bearing the *kunya* Abū Ja‘far, and his father had the *kunya* Abū ‘Amr. Together they were the two *wakīls* on behalf of the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) (AS), and they both have a high station among the sect (*tā’ifa*).²

In terms of narrative evidence of the activities of Abū Ja‘far, Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba* provides our fullest information, but its testament is compromised by two elements: its commitment to the task of establishing the narrative of the Four Envoys; and Ṭūsī’s use of sources that put forward a particularly hagiographic portrait of Abū Ja‘far. If we compare the earlier sources with Ṭūsī, we see a steady growth in his reputation. Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba* is particularly important for our understanding of various kinds of opposition to Abū Ja‘far and the Occultation faction. However, in this too, his account operates with an agenda. The types of opposition he brings together in the chapter entitled “The Censured Ones who Claimed *Bāb*-hood” are very diverse, with little real connection other than they posed a threat to the power of the Envoys, or to Ṭūsī’s depiction of the authority of the Envoys. This chapter has a clear rhetorical purpose in Ṭūsī’s project of canon-formation, acting as a negative mirror-image to the chapter on the Four Envoys and other praised figures. Ṭūsī’s synthesis of these various types of opposition helps us to understand some of what Abū Ja‘far and the *wakīls* who supported him faced, but at the same time, there is a risk that we conflate very different types of phenomenon, which all appear under the same rubric in Ṭūsī’s book.

² Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 447.

As we have seen, the earliest reference to envoy-like figures is in Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī's *Tanbīh*, written in 290/903, which survives preserved in Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, analyzed above. Abū Ja'far is not mentioned by name in this text, but clearly the role of intermediary with the Hidden Imam was very important for Abū Sahl as an epistemological prop for proving the existence of the Imam.

Abū Ja'far is mentioned in Kulaynī's *Kāfī*, but very fleetingly, only being mentioned alongside 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd in the *thiqa* hadith,³ which itself appears to be a later addition, especially given that Abū Ja'far appears to have belonged to the younger generation, rather than the old guard mentioned by Abū Sahl. Why did Kulaynī not preserve reports about Abū Ja'far acting as Envoy? The absence of Abū Ja'far in the role of Envoy from the *Kāfī* is not unaccountable: for Kulaynī, the idea of Envoy was clearly not yet established, or at least not as a canonized religious category, and so transmitting reports about his activities would have no particular religious value. However it is possible that Kulaynī may have recognized the *de facto* presence of *wakīls* leading the Shi'ī community without reports about them needing to be preserved in the *Kāfī* as religious knowledge. It is possible that Kulaynī recognized the authority of the Envoys, but we may perhaps conclude that he did not consider them in their later theologized roles as guarantors of the existence of the Imams, and therefore guarantors of salvation, as Abū Sahl did, and later generations following him, and, in particular, Nu'mānī.⁴ Instead, Kulaynī was interested in documenting all reports that lent credence to the existence of the Hidden Child Imam, and it is in this capacity that 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd and Abū Ja'far are mentioned, as particularly reliable witnesses and trusted servants of the Imams. Other figures

³ See previous chapters.

⁴ Nu'mānī, *Ghayba*, 164; 178-9.

like Ḥājiz and Aḥmad b. Ishāq appear to have been equally prominent for Kulaynī and the hadith transmitters of the early Occultation, each playing slightly different roles in the reports.

After Kulaynī, Khaṣībī's *Hidāya* adds a few reports about Abū Ja'far. The structure of the *Hidāya* suggests successive stages of production, with the final section on the *wakīls* being added later than the sections on the Imams and the *bābs*. Earlier sections do not display much interest in a canonized list of *wakīls*. There is but a single mention of Abū Ja'far in the earlier section about the twelve Imams, reported on the authority of his brother, Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān al-'Amrī.⁵ Interestingly, the *Hidāya* is the only one of our sources to include testimony from this brother of Abū Ja'far. The chains of transmission indicate that Khaṣībī had directly communicated with him. Though we might expect the testimony of Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān al-'Amrī to be particularly favorable to his brother, in fact, this single report depicts Abū Ja'far as a mere witness to the miraculous activities of the *nāḥiya*.⁶ From an insider 'Amrī perspective, then, this earliest attestation to Abū Ja'far appears to give him a privileged place as a reporter regarding activities of the Occultation-era *nāḥiya*, but does not seem to impute to him the canonized status of Envoy. These quotations from Aḥmad al-'Amrī appear in the chapter on the Twelfth Imam, not the final chapter on the *wakīls*. In the chapter on the *wakīls*, Abū Ja'far appears in a different role, again suggesting that the chapter on the *wakīls* was a later addition, reflecting the more fully developed canonical nature of the Envoys, as an addition to the earlier pantheon of Imams and *bābs*. Even in the chapter on the *wakīls*, far less attention is given to Abū Ja'far than to 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd, who appears as a problem that needs to be solved, due to the fact that his status as *wakīl*

⁵ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 279.

⁶ In this, Abū Ja'far reports that "a man from the people of the *sawād* carried much money to the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) (AS) and it was returned to him..." Abū Ja'far may or may not have been directly involved in this transaction, but all we can infer from this that he was a privileged eyewitness. Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 279.

of the Eleventh Imam interfered with their perception of Ibn Nuṣayr as the Eleventh Imam's *bāb*. Abū Ja'far is merely mentioned in passing as part of the pantheon of Envoys.⁷ Unfortunately, we cannot precisely date Khaṣībī's *Hidāya*, though Khaṣībī does appear to have died before Ibn Bābūya wrote *Kamāl al-dīn*, making the *Hidāya* probably the earliest for the role of Abū Ja'far as Envoy, unless we suppose the *wakīls* section to have been added after Khaṣībī's death. Nuṣayrīs were clearly active participants in the production of the image of 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd in particular, though they wrote less about his son Abū Ja'far, probably because he was not an eyewitness to the Child Imam, and also because he was a less problematic figure, not overlapping with Ibn Nuṣayr's life and authority, and therefore requiring no special attention.

Nu'mānī's *Ghayba*, completed in 342/953 gives the first clear mention of the canonical role of the Envoys (*sufarā'*) in defining the distinction between lesser and complete Occultation:

فأما الغيبة الأولى فهي الغيبة التي كانت السفراء فيها بين الإمام (عليه السلام) وبين الخلق قياماً منصوبين
 ظاهرين موجودي الأشخاص والأعيان ، يخرج على أيديهم غوامض العلم ، وعويص الحكم ، والأجوبة عن
 كل ما كان يسأل عنه من المعضلات والمشكلات ، وهي الغيبة القصيرة التي انقضت أيامها وتصرمت مدتها.
 والغيبة الثانية هي التي ارتفع فيها أشخاص السفراء والوسائط للأمر الذي يريد الله تعالى

And as for the first Occultation, it is the Occultation in which the Envoys were present between the Imam (AS) and his creation, standing appointed, visible, present in figure and in essence, from whose hands issued obscure points of knowledge and abstruse wisdom, and answers about whatever he was asked in the way of intricate questions and problems, and that was the short Occultation whose days have passed, and whose time is

⁷ Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 392.

out, and the second Occultation is that in which the figures of the Envoys and the intermediaries have been raised, according to God's command (T).⁸

However, Nu'mānī mentions no Envoy by name, and so Nu'mānī may have had in mind the anonymous functionaries of the *nāḥiya*, or figures like Ḥājiz, rather than, or as well as, the 'Amrīs.

In Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, composed soon after 368/978-9, the first clear reports appear that give narrative accounts of the activities of Abū Ja'far as Envoy. Abū Ja'far's increased importance in this work accompanies a general inflation in the stock of the Envoys as a theologically important category, following Nu'mānī's declaration of the role of the Envoys in defining the nature of the Occultation. In the *Kamāl*, Abū Ja'far appears both as an actor in the drama of the Hidden Imam, and also as a significant transmitter of reports about the existence of the Hidden Imam, both reports attributed to 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd, and also reports in which Abū Ja'far claims to have communicated with the Hidden Imam in his own right. Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, composed a century after the death of the Eleventh Imam, then, is the earliest source to provide substantial to support the claim of Abū Ja'far to be an Envoy with quasi-Imamic status. In addition to Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl*, Ṭūsī's *Ghayba* is the other key source for information on the period of Abū Ja'far, filling in mysterious references that exist in earlier sources, and adding new narratives that do not exist anywhere else. It is also a source with an agenda. Among extant sources, the doctrine of the Four Envoys is given its first authoritative, explicit statement in Ṭūsī's *Ghayba*, and so its testimony regarding the life and activities of Abū Ja'far must be treated carefully. Ṭūsī seems to have relied on constructions of a canonical succession of Four Envoys that had been produced earlier, and which provide him some of his most detailed reports

⁸ Nu'mānī, *Ghayba*, 178-9.

for the life of Abū Ja‘far. As Klemm has pointed out, it is just these sources which should be treated with especial caution, as these reports derive from a descendent of Abū Ja‘far’s who clearly sought to burnish his illustrious kinsman’s image:

He is no less than Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Kātib, from whose book, *Akhbār Abī ‘Amr wa-Abī Ja‘far al-‘Amrīyayn* al-Ṭūsī must have drawn his information. Abū Naṣr, known as Ibn Barnīya, also furnished al-Ṭūsī with information about the third and fourth Envoys. He was the grandson of the younger ‘Amrī’s daughter Umm Kulthūm, whose husband, remarkably was also a Nawbakhtī and a secretary of Ibn Rawḥ’s. She is said to have been his informant in many instances. Ibn Barnīya was a contemporary of al-Najāshī who claimed to have seen him for the last time in the year 400/1009-10. Al-Najāshī tells us that Ibn Barnīya’s book was the model for a *Kitāb akhbār al-wukalā’ al-arba‘a*⁹ by the Baṣran Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī in Nūḥ al-Sīrāfī (Ibn Nūḥ), which was also frequently used by al-Ṭūsī, as can be seen from the *isnāds*. Ibn Nūḥ died during al-Ṭūsī’s lifetime.¹⁰

The general idea of the Four Envoys, or the Four Agents, the canonical form of which we find in Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba*, had been produced a generation earlier, employing the family narratives propagated by Abū Ja‘far’s descendent, Ibn Barnīya. These family narratives are notably more hagiographical than the reports transmitted by Abū Ja‘far’s brother in the *Hidāya* which do not give any special role to Abū Ja‘far.

In seeking to understand the role of Abū Ja‘far, then, we must negotiate the fluid transformations in the memory of the community over the generations. It is clear that his role

⁹ This is probably the same work mentioned in Ṭūsī’s *Fihrist* under the title *Kitāb akhbār al-abwāb*. 84-5.

¹⁰ Klemm, “*Sufarā’*,” 148.

was gradually inflated with each generation. Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl* is the earliest source to provide much explicit information about his activities, but by this time, the theologization of Abū Ja'far's role was well underway. Indeed this theologization created the conditions under which the preservation of accounts about his activities became valuable. Ibn Bābūya's *Kamāl* is our most useful starting point for the life and activities of Abū Ja'far, with the careful use of additional materials from Ṭūsī and others.

7.3 Was Abū Ja'far a scholar?

Abū Ja'far does not appear as a significant scholar in the Twelver sources. There are some suggestions that he had a scholarly output, but these may be tied up with later claims to defend his religious authority. If his purported activities and statements have any authenticity, he must have had a broad familiarity with the scholarly tradition at a practical level, in order to maintain continuity with past doctrines while effectively projecting his authority and that of the Hidden Imam into the community. This had been partially accomplished by Ḥājiz and Aḥmad b. Ishāq, it seems. Whatever Abū Ja'far's particular contribution, it was not through scholarship that it was achieved, and it was left for others to document his achievements of the practical application of intellectual resources.

There was a potential tension in the practical exercise of authority and the epistemic authority of scholarship, though Abū Ja'far appears to have been supported by scholars with similar aims of ensuring continuity in his day. Kashshī's *Rijāl* work begins with a series of hadith that explicitly indicate that the transmission of hadith is the primary criterion for judging the status of the followers of the Imams: "Abū 'Abd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] said: Know the degree of the [Imam's] men with respect to us according to the degree of their transmission of reports from

us.”¹¹ In addition, there was a famous hadith circulating that the scholars would be the “heirs of the prophets,” though in Shi‘ism, that had typically been applied to the Imams themselves, during the lives, rather than the regular scholars.¹²

By the criteria of hadith transmission and scholarship, Abū Ja‘far does not score highly. Ṭūsī does not mention Abū Ja‘far in his *Fihrist*, the primary repository for the names and works of the significant scholars of earlier Imamis. Kashshī refers to the ‘Amrīs as *wakīls*, but not as scholars.¹³ Najāshī does not include a biography of Abū Ja‘far, though as we have seen, he does mention him in the context of the *Masā’il* work by ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far, as a transmitter of the opinions of the Eleventh Imam.¹⁴ One report in Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba* does ascribe a number of works of scholarship to Abū Ja‘far’s name:

قال ابن نوح : أخبرني أبو نصر هبة الله ابن بنت أم كلثوم بنت أبي جعفر العمري قال : كان لأبي جعفر محمد بن عثمان العمري كتب مصنفة في الفقه مما سمعها من أبي محمد الحسن عليه السلام ، ومن صاحب عليه السلام ، ومن أبيه عثمان بن سعيد ، عن أبي محمد وعن أبيه علي بن محمد عليهما السلام فيها كتب ترجمتها كتب الأشربة . ذكرت الكبيرة أم كلثوم بنت أبي جعفر رضي الله عنها أنها وصلت إلى أبي القاسم الحسين بن روح رضي الله عنه عند الوصية إليه ، وكانت في يده . قال أبو نصر : وأظنها قالت وصلت بعد ذلك إلى أبي الحسن السمرري رضي الله عنه وأرضاه.

Ibn Nūḥ>>>

Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh [Ibn Barniyya], the son of the daughter of Umm Kulthūm, the daughter of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī said: Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī had books written about *fiqh* from that which he had heard from Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan

¹¹ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 1-5.

¹² See Takim, *Heirs*, 33-36.

¹³ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 407-10.

¹⁴ See above, and Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 219.

al-‘Askarī and from the Lord (*al-ṣāhib*) [12th Imam] (AS) and from his [own] father ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd from Abū Muḥammad [‘Askarī] (AS) and from his father from ‘Alī b. Muḥammad [Hādī] (AS) amongst which [books] I have glossed (*tarjamtuhā*) the *Books of the Drinks* which the lady Umm Kulthūm bt. Abū Ja‘far (RAA) mentioned, saying that it had been given to Ibn Rawḥ (RAA) when he was designated for succession (*waṣīyya*) and it was in his possession. Abū Naṣr [Ibn Barniyya] said: I think she said “after that, it reached Abū al-Ḥasan al-Samurī (RAAWA)”.¹⁵

This statement seems designed to affirm the scholarly credentials of Abū Ja‘far, and also depicts a mechanism of transfer of knowledge which mimics the conceptions of Imamic transfer of knowledge in the form of special books, in this case, continuing down through the Envoys.¹⁶ It may be corroborated by one of the rescripts issued by Abū Ja‘far which makes a fleeting statement about the legal status of beer and a bitter drink called *shalmāb*.¹⁷ However, if this book did exist, it had clearly not been considered a work of major scholarship, being mentioned by no others than Abū Ja‘far’s grandson, Ibn Barniyya, and it does not seem to have survived until the time of Ṭūsī.

Tellingly the mention of Abū Ja‘far’s books comes from Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba*, not his *Fihrist*, suggesting that, as a piece of information Ṭūsī valued it as an indication of the status of one of the Envoys, not as a record of the scholarly achievement of the Shi‘i community. It is perhaps not surprising that the *Ghayba* works do make sure to mention some of Abū Ja‘far’s achievements as a hadith reporter, given the remit of these works to shore up his canonical status. Most of the reports transmitted on the authority of Abū Ja‘far directly address the Occultation.

¹⁵ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 226.

¹⁶ See Rubin, “Prophets and Progenitors.”

¹⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483-5.

He reports various testimonies to the birth of the Child Imam from his father and others,¹⁸ and two hadith in which he claims to have seen the Twelfth Imam at ritual sites of Mecca.¹⁹ Ibn Bābūya also carries a hadith from Abū Ja‘far in which he transmits a report from the Imams affirming some key points of the doctrine of the Occultation.²⁰ A large number of rescripts appear in our sources as having been transmitted by Abū Ja‘far which indicate his role as spokesman for the Twelfth Imam. We have already seen how his name appears in the title of a book by ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī: *Questions for Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan (AS) by the Hand of Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī*.²¹ This suggests that an important part of Abū Ja‘far’s role in the *nāḥiya* was the reproduction and distribution knowledge from the earlier Imams, and using this knowledge as a way of shaping and enforcing his vision of the community in the current era.

7.4 The *interregnum* in the *wakīlate* and opposition to Abū Ja‘far

While later accounts attempt to maintain the fluid and inevitable nature of the succession from the early *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*, the old guard who first attested to the existence of the Hidden Imam, and the later Envoys, Abū Sahl’s testimony, as we have seen suggests a different picture. Returning again to the testimony the *Tanbīh*, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī gives a timeline for the contact between the community and the Hidden Imam:

ثم كانت كتب ابنه الخلف بعده تخرج إلى الشيعة بالأمر والنهي على أيدي رجال أبيه الثقات أكثر من عشرين سنة ،
ثم انقطعت المكاتبة ومضى أكثر رجال الحسن عليه السلام الذين كانوا شهدوا بأمر الإمام بعده وبقي منهم رجل

¹⁸ For example, *Kamāl*, 430-1; 433.

¹⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 440.

²⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 409, and see below.

²¹ Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 220.

واحد قد أجمعوا على عدالته وثقته فأمر الناس بالكتمان وأن لا يذيعوا شيئا من أمر الامام ، وانقطعت المكاتبة فصح لنا ثبات عين الامام بما ذكرت من الدليل

Then the letters of [‘Askarī]’s son, the successor after him were issued to the Shi‘a with commanding and forbidding from the hands of the men (*rijāl*) of his father, the reliable ones (*thiqāt*), for more than twenty years, and then the writing was cut off, and most of the men of al-Ḥasan [al-‘Askarī] (AS) who had given witness to the leadership (*amr*) of the Imam after him passed away, and one man remained whose probity (‘*adāla*) and trustworthiness (*thiqa*) they were unanimous about, and he ordered the people to secrecy (*kitmān*) and not to broadcast anything of the situation (*amr*) of the Imam. Then the correspondence [with the Imam] was cut off, and the proof (*thabāt*) of the physical presence of the Imam was established by the proofs (*dalīl*) that I have mentioned.²²

This statement provides us a timeline for the community’s experience of the Hidden Imam’s rescripts. They were initially issued first by a group of al-‘Askarī’s close companions for a period between 260-280/874-893, and then by just one of these men, after whose death this correspondence was terminated. As we have mentioned, some names of the old guard are fairly well known: Ḥājiz, Aḥmad b. Ishāq, and ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, at least as a witness to the existence of the Imam, if not necessarily participating in the financial administration of the Occultation-era *nāḥiya*. However, the identity of the one member of the old guard who survived the others is less clear. After he also died, the belief still existed that there was someone in touch with the Imam, up until the time of Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī, which Abū Sahl describes as a “hidden man from the Imam’s Shi‘a.” We will address this idea of a hidden *wakīl* below.

²² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 93.

7.5 Ibn Mahziyār and Abū Ja‘far’s succession to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd

When, then, did Abū Ja‘far begin to stake his claim to authority? As we have seen, given his death date in 305/917, he cannot have been part of the older generation of trusted companions of the Eleventh Imam, mentioned by Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī who asserted the existence of the Hidden Imam after 260/874. He would, however, have been present to witness these early events, and may have participated in some way as a junior partner. By 290/903, when Abū Sahl wrote the *Tanbīh*, it is clear that Abū Ja‘far was not yet established as a preeminent authority in the community, though by this time, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, Aḥmad b. Ishāq and Ḥājiz would all have died, and those who had connections to them, including al-Asadī and Abū Ja‘far, must have already been making plans to maintain the institutions of the community.

One of the arguments by which Abū Ja‘far’s authority was established was through his father’s pre-Occultation authority. This may initially have been a mere invocation of family prestige. Eventually, it came to be written as a quasi-Imamic process of designation and inheritance of religious authority. One of the reports of Abū Ja‘far’s succession to the authority of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd gives us a date, and certain indications that help us position this claim. Ṭūsī quotes a rescript which was issued to the doubting *wakīl* Muḥammad b. Mahziyār which seeks to affirm the succession of Abū Ja‘far after the death of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd. The issuing of a rescript indicates that this matter was of some significance, suggesting that Ibn Mahziyār had grave doubts about the succession:

عن محمد بن همام ، قال : حدثني محمد بن حمويه بن عبد العزيز الرازي في سنة ثمانين ومائتين قال : حدثنا محمد بن إبراهيم بن مهزيار الأهوازي أنه خرج إليه بعد وفاة أبي عمرو : والابن وقاه الله لم يزل نقتنا في حياة ...
" وعن أمرنا يأمر الابن وبه يعمل ، تولاه الله ، فانتبه إلى قوله : " وعرف معاملتنا ذلك

Muḥammad b. Humām>>>>

Muḥammad b. Ḥamawayh b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Rāzī told us in 280 [/893]>>>

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī said that after the death of Abū ‘Amr [‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī] the following was issued to him: “And the son [Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī] may God protect him, was always our trustworthy agent (*thiqa*) during the lifetime of the father [‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd] ... And the son commands from our command, and he acts according to it, may God befriend him...”²³

Here, then, Ibn Mahziyār is depicted as having vanquished his doubts, by 280/893, and lending his support to the claim of Abū Ja‘far to succeed to the authority of his father. The mechanism of this support is the distribution of an Imamic statement supporting this authority. This tells us more about Abū Ja‘far’s claims than those of his father. It puts forward the claim that Abū Ja‘far was *not* a neophyte, contrary to what Abū Sahl’s testimony suggests, but had always been the Imam’s trusted agent during the lifetime of his father. This makes the claim for a kind of period of apprenticeship, during the lifetime of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd in the pre-Occultation period and early Occultation period, in which Abū Ja‘far’s authority was not explicitly visible, thereby requiring that it should be supported through Imamic rescript, giving him some connection to the Eleventh and Twelfth Imams. This claim for connection with the Imams supplied what was so distressingly missing after the rupture in the Occultation-era wakīlate. Once the claim for connection with the Imams is asserted, the next step follows naturally: the Imam commands the Shi‘a to obey Abū Ja‘far, as the carrier of the Imam’s own authority.

Again the word *thiqa* appears as a pivotal descriptor for the authority of the ‘Amrīs, though notably here Abū Ja‘far is not the *thiqa* of the Eleventh Imam, but rather of the Twelfth Imam, *during the lifetime of his father*. This suggests that Abū Ja‘far’s rise to authority was

²³ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225.

established through a retrospective recourse to his father's authority in the Occultation period, rather than directly to the Eleventh Imam. The existence of such a rescript indicates that by 280/893, Abū Ja'far was beginning to assert his claim to authority. Perhaps this assertion was not public enough to attract the attention of Abū Sahl, or perhaps Abū Sahl rejected the claim. It is quite possible that, in order to assert this authority, Abū Ja'far started by courting individual *wakīls* like Ibn Mahziyār and al-Asadī and began to build up a consensus slowly. This rescript also gives us 280/893 as a *terminus ante quem* for the death of 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd, though it may have occurred many years earlier. This rescript adds to the picture of Ibn Mahziyār's career of doubt which we have examined so far. After doubting the existence of the Hidden Imam, he appears to have become a strong supporter of Abū Ja'far's claim to authority some time before 280/893.

7.6 Rival *bābs*

It is likely that it was the death of the last surviving representative of the old guard and the ending of the rescripts which precipitated a contest between the three *bābs* mentioned in the *Dalā'il*, all of whom claimed authority, including Abū Ja'far, a *ghulāt* leader named Ishāq 'the Red' (*al-aḥmar*), who died in 286/899,²⁴ and the bureaucrat al-Bāqīṭānī. The *Dalā'il* suggestion that this took place a year or two after the death of the Eleventh Imam is perhaps not very reliable, though it does correspond to the impression conveyed by reports about Ḥājiz, and it also corresponds to the period of the inheritance dispute between Ja'far 'the Liar' which would have made it difficult for the *wakīls* to operate out of the Imam's house in Samarra any more, perhaps explaining the use of another house as indicated in the *Dalā'il*. This dating does not fit with the

²⁴ "He lived and worked above all in Baghdad, where he died in 286/899. The community of Ishāqites named after him is attested to in Baghdad and al-Madā'in." Halm, *Gnosis*, 278.

testimony of Abū Sahl, however, and it is likely that the *Dalā'il* may represent a compressed or mosaic assemblage of different elements from the early Occultation period.

The disruption in the operations of the pre-Occultation elite *wakīls* may have opened the door for the *ghulāt bābs* who had followings beyond the direct core of companions of the Imams. The involvement of these *ghulāt* figures is significant as it suggests the *ghulāt-bābī* genealogy of the idea of the Envoy, which appears to have caused problems in the days of Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī, as we shall see below. The involvement of *ghulāt* conceptions of *bāb* at this stage is perhaps unsurprising, as *ghulāt* groups had always ceded a kind of autonomy to their leaders who were seen to participate in the spiritual essence of the Imam, and therefore could speak directly as divinely-inspired spokespersons for truth without being held to strict epistemological standards regarding the transmission of reports from the Imam.

7.7 The younger generation: support for Abū Ja'far

A key fact that emerges from the various sources in their depiction of Abū Ja'far is that he had the support of a number of other transitional figures who, like him, were members of the younger generation, but sufficiently connected to the old guard to have a stake in the continuity of the institutions, forms and dynamics they had established, and to make a claim to authority through this connection. Al-Qaṭṭān and al-Asadī both bring money to Abū Ja'far in Baghdad. Given that al-Asadī appears to have been some form of designated successor to Ḥājiz, his support is particularly significant.²⁵ Ibn Mahziyār, a transitional figure who appears to have become a *wakīl* around the time of the Eleventh Imam's death, or soon after, though he initially withheld his approval from the Occultation faction, he eventually appears to have been won over

²⁵ Hussain states that al-Qaṭṭān is also mentioned in Mufīd's *Irshād* as being dealt with as if he were the Envoy (*safīr*). *Occultation*, 93.

and supported Abū Ja‘far, underscoring his claim to authority through his *wakīl* father. As we have seen, ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī began to transmit reports and rescripts on the authority of Abū Ja‘far, visiting Kufa in 290/903. This all begins to build up a picture in which Abū Ja‘far gradually built up support among prominent *wakīls*, scholars and members of the community just as the rupture created by the deaths of the old guard occurred. He did not, however, go uncontested.

7.8 Opposition to Abū Ja‘far

As we have seen, the *Dalā‘il* presents a picture in which perplexity was created at a moment when the Imam’s *bāb* or deputy was uncertain, and when there were three competing candidates: Abū Ja‘far, al-Bāqīṭānī and Ishāq al-Aḥmar. As Halm notes, Ishāq al-Aḥmar was a gnostic of the Mufaḍḍal tradition, and head of the ‘Alyā’iyya²⁶ of his time, and therefore closely associated in doctrines with the Nuṣayrīs. This tradition gave prominent place to the idea of *bāb* as participating in the divine essence of the Imam. However, the Ishāqīs and the Nuṣayrīs followed different leaders and became bitter rivals.²⁷ There clear indications of tension between Ishāq’s followers and both the Twelvers and the Nuṣayrīs. For the Nuṣayrīs Ishāq al-Aḥmar seems to have posed a threat as a rival to Ibn Nuṣayr for the station of *bāb* to the Eleventh Imam.²⁸ After the death of Ibn Nuṣayr, his followers must have continued to reject Ishāq al-Aḥmar, but they end up as part of the Twelver movement, accepting the existence of the Hidden Imam, and ultimately the authority of the Four Envoys also.

As for al-Bāqīṭānī, we know of an Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Bāqīṭānī, an important official in the caliphal administration, a Mu‘tazilite and a prominent Shi‘i, who

²⁶ A sect ascribing divinity to ‘Alī.

²⁷ Halm, *Gnosis*, 278-9.

²⁸ See Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 9-10.

patronized the poet Ibn al-Rūmī as did Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī.²⁹ This is presumably the same Bāqīṭānī that Ṭūsī depicts as receiving a special warning from the Vizier (probably Ibn Bulbul) not to visit the shrines of the Quraysh, as the Caliph was arresting such pilgrims, presumably as a way of cracking down on Shi‘a.³⁰ If it is true that this same man was acting as a *bāb*, as suggested in the *Dalā‘il*, it is indeed noteworthy, though I have found no further evidence of his *bāb*-like activities. Interestingly enough, however, this same Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Bāqīṭānī is mentioned as having been present upon the death of Abū Ja‘far, and giving his allegiance to Ibn Rawḥ along with other Shi‘ī notables and bureaucrats, suggesting that, whatever the rivalry between him and Abū Ja‘far, these differences were eventually solved and Bāqīṭānī pledged his allegiance to Abū Ja‘far in the interests of unity.³¹

7.8.1 Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-Karkhī

In addition to the opposition of rival *bābs*, there was also opposition from cautious Imamīs who did not accept Abū Ja‘far’s claims to authority. One report gives us the name of another *wakīl*, Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-Karkhī (whom we should not confuse with Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-‘Abartā’ī, as Jassim Hussain does)³² who opposed the idea that Abū Ja‘far had succeeded to the *wakīlate*. While this appears in Ṭūsī’s chapter on “The Censured Ones who Claimed *Bab*-hood”, Aḥmad b. Hilāl’s crime is not depicted here as any kind of *bābī* claim, but simply an opposition to Abū Ja‘far’s authority:

قال أبو علي بن همام : كان أحمد بن هلال من أصحاب أبي محمد عليه السلام ، فاجتمعت الشيعة على وكالة محمد

بن عثمان رضي الله عنه بنص الحسن عليه السلام في حياته ، ولما مضى الحسن عليه السلام قالت الشيعة

²⁹ See Robert McKinney, *The Case of Rhyme Versus Reason: Ibn Al-Rūmī and His Poetics in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 10.

³⁰ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 178.

³¹ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.

³² Jassim Hussain, *Occultation*, 99-102. See Modarressi for a correction of this mistake. *Crisis*, 67, n63.

الجماعة له : ألا تقبل أمر أبي جعفر محمد بن عثمان وترجع إليه وقد نص عليه الامام المفترض الطاعة ؟ . فقال لهم : لم أسمعُه ينص عليه بالوكالة ، وليس أنكر أباه - يعني عثمان بن سعيد - فأما أن أقطع أن أبا جعفر وكيل صاحب الزمان فلا أجسر عليه فقالوا : قد سمعته غيرك ، فقال : أنتم وما سمعتم ، ووقف على أبي جعفر ، فلعنوه وتبرؤا منه . ثم ظهر التوقيع على يد أبي القاسم بن روح بلعنه والبراءة منه في جملة من لعن.

Abū ‘Alī b. Humām said:

Aḥmad b. Hilāl was one of the companions of Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] (AS), and the Shi‘a agreed upon the wakīlate of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān (RAA) by the designation (*naṣṣ*) of al-Ḥasan (AS) during his lifetime. When al-Ḥasan died (AS), the Shi‘a who agreed upon him said, “Don’t you accept the leadership (*amr*) of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān and refer to him, for he was designated by the Imam to whom obedience is obligatory?”

And [Aḥmad b. Hilāl] said to them, “I did not hear [the Imam] designate Abū Ja‘far for the *wikāla*, though God does not deny his father (meaning ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd). But as for stating with certainty that Abū Ja‘far is the *wakīl* of the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) well I do not dare to.

And they said, "Others that you heard him."

And he said, “But you did not hear!” So he hesitated about Abū Ja‘far, and they cursed him and disassociated from him. Then the rescript (*tawqī‘*) appeared at the hand of Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ (RA), cursing him and announcing his ostracism (*barā‘a*) amongst those who were cursed.³³

There are a number of difficulties with the dating of this report. The phrasing here suggests that this report was formed relatively late under the influence of the Four Envoy theory, for the claim

³³ Tusi, *Ghayba*, 248.

is made that the Imam designated Abū Ja‘far directly, *during his lifetime*, probably following the *thiqa* hadith in the form in which Kulaynī transmits it. Aḥmad b. Hilāl is said to be a companion of the Eleventh Imam. This suggests that he was a member of the old guard. But he was cursed by Ibn Rawḥ, presumably after the death of Abū Ja‘far. Can we harmonize these elements? It is possible that Aḥmad b. Hilāl was not seen as a member of the old guard due to his opposition to the claims of the Occultation faction. It is also possible that Abū Ja‘far began to make some claims upon wakīlate soon after the death of the Eleventh Imam, though his rise to preeminent authority may have been later. In this case, either there has been a compression of time in the retelling, and Abū Ja‘far’s claims to authority emerged later, but have been projected back to the death of the Eleventh Imam, or Abū Ja‘far started furthering his claims during the authority of the early *nāḥiya*, perhaps in collaboration with them, or perhaps in tacit opposition to them, or as one of a number of figures who claimed to be inspired by the Imams who were collaborating or competing during the early, fluid years of chaos.

In spite of the difficulties with this report, it seems clear that Aḥmad b. Hilāl viewed the claims of Abū Ja‘far as the claim of an upstart, without proper Imamic designation. Perhaps the difficulties with this report can be explained by a process of redaction precisely aimed at erasing the memory of Abū Ja‘far’s status as a something of a neophyte. Aḥmad b. Hilāl’s critique is important, for it suggests that, for him, during the early Occultation period, authority still depended upon an established relationship with the Eleventh Imam, rather than any claims to direct relations with the Twelfth Imam as expressed by Abū Sahl and later writers. It is presumably against such arguments that a literature supporting Abū Ja‘far’s designation by his father and the Imam was generated, resulting in reports like Kulaynī’s *thiqa* hadith, and the rescript issued upon the death of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, which was reported by Ibn Mahziyār.

It is notable that the dissent of Aḥmad b. Hilāl, a companion of ‘Askarī, appears to have continued to be a problematic issue throughout the tenure of Abū Ja‘far, to the extent that it was deemed necessary to finally issue a statement of cursing and ostracism at the hand of his successor, Ibn Rawḥ, presumably after Abū Ja‘far’s death after 305/917, when Ibn Rawḥ succeeded to his authority. I would suggest that this does not imply that Aḥmad b. Hilāl continued to be a threat, but rather that this ostracism represents a further piece of evidence for the gradual process of defending the legacy of Abū Ja‘far, by blackening the reputation of those who had opposed him during his lifetime. The fact that Ibn Rawḥ circulated the statement ostracizing Aḥmad b. Hilāl indicates that Ibn Rawḥ was clearly motivated to preserve the legacy of Abū Ja‘far, through whose authority he traced his own. In contradiction of Ṭūsī’s listing of Ibn Hilāl amongst those “who claimed *bāb*-hood” we have no reports that attribute to Ibn Hilāl claims of *bāb*-hood, indeed, he is described as merely ‘hesitating’ about the authority of Abū Ja‘far. This, however was clearly too much for the fragile state of Occultation-era leadership, and the ostracism is evidence of muscular attempts to assert unity and consensus, defending the legacy of Abū Ja‘far after his death. This need to defend his legacy must be seen as due to the *interregnum* that occurred between the leadership of the old guard and Abū Ja‘far’s subsequent establishment of the office of Envoy.

7.8.2 Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl (al-Bilālī) and “the split” in the Occultation faction

Another figure who opposed Abū Ja‘far’s authority was Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Bilāl,³⁴ or al-Bilālī. He was an important *wakīl* under ‘Askarī. There is a certain in clarity in the sources, for it appears that there were two al-Bilālīs, father and son, and it is not entirely clear

³⁴ Usually just called “Abū Ṭāhir al-Bilālī”, Ṭūsī does mention his full name as Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Bilāl, Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 219.

which the sources refer to when they simply say “al-Bilālī.” Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Bilālī must have been the son of an elder ‘Alī al-Bilālī. There is a report in which ‘Alī b. Bilāl, presumably Abū Ṭāhir’s father, was among those to witness the Child Imam during the lifetime of ‘Askarī:

قال جعفر بن محمد بن مالك الفزاري البزاز ، عن جماعة من الشيعة منهم علي بن بلال وأحمد بن هلال ومحمد بن معاوية بن حكيم والحسن بن أيوب بن نوح ... قالوا جميعا : اجتمعنا إلى أبي محمد الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام نسأله عن الحجة من بعده ، وفي مجلسه عليه السلام أربعون رجلا.

Many Shi‘a, including ‘Alī b. Bilāl, Aḥmad b. Hilāl, Muḥammad b. Mu‘āwiya b. Ḥakīm, al-Ḥasan b. Ayyūb b. Nūḥ... said together: We gathered at Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī (AS) to ask him about the Proof (*ḥujja*) after him. There were forty men at his audience (*majlis*).³⁵

This group of forty men are then allowed to witness the Child Imam. This suggests that ‘Alī b. Bilāl was the prominent Bilālī at the time of the Occultation, and the man referred to in Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list of *wakīls* who saw the Imam. However, we also have evidence that in addition to the father, the son, Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl, was a prominent *wakīl* at the time of ‘Askarī, for Abū Ja‘far transmits a rescript from him, quoted by Ṭūsī.³⁶ Either of these Ibn Bilāls might have been the *wakīl* who was praised by al-‘Askarī as “the reliable, the trustworthy” (*al-thiqa al-ma`mūn*) in a rescript preserved by Kashshī,³⁷ thereby applying to him the same language applied to the *wakīl* ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd. It is possible that the father and son were confused or

³⁵ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 222.

³⁶ In this rescript, ‘Askarī affirms his support for the apparently rather spendthrift follower, ‘Alī b. Ja‘far. Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 217.

³⁷ Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 407-10.

conflated at some point. At any rate, it appears that it was Abū Ṭāhir who was the prime player in the Occultation period.

Another indication that Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl was a member of the old guard is that a report exists in which Abū Ṭāhir wrote to ‘Askarī to inform him of the large sums of money that another *wakīl*, ‘Alī b. Ja‘far, was spending, receiving a note from ‘Askarī in reply, in which he expresses his support for ‘Alī b. Ja‘far, and stating that the Imam had, indeed, made large gifts to this *wakīl*. The key point of interest here is that this hadīth was transmitted from Abū Ṭāhir al-Bilālī by Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī.³⁸ This confirms the generational dynamics between them, as Abū Ṭāhir appears as a pre-Occultation *wakīl*, able to relate a report with authority to Abū Ja‘far on the circumstances at the time of ‘Askarī. This then suggests that Abū Ja‘far was reliant upon such testimony from the earlier generation. Though he was doubtless alive during the Imamate of ‘Askarī, it was the men of his father’s generation, including Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl, who could interpret the events at that time for him.

Given Abū Ṭāhir’s service of Imam ‘Askarī, we must place him amongst the old guard mentioned by Abū Sahl. As part of the old guard, al-Bilālī was instrumental in passing on a letter from the Eleventh Imam that provided evidence for the existence of the Child Imam. Al-Bilālī is quoted as saying,

فخرج إلي من أبي محمد عليه السلام قبل مضيئه بسنتين يخبرني بالخلف من بعده ، ثم خرج إلي بعد مضيئه بثلاثة أيام يخبرني بذلك فلعن الله من جدد أولياء الله حقوقهم وحمل الناس على أكتافهم، والحمد لله كثيرا .

[A letter] was issued to me from Abū Muḥammad [al-‘Askarī] two years before his death, telling me of the offspring (*khalaf*) after him, then [a letter] was issued to me three days

³⁸ Tusi, *Ghayba*, 217.

after his death, informing me of that. And may God curse whoever denies God's friends (*awliyā*) their rights (*ḥuqūq*),³⁹ and who carries the people on their shoulders, and great thanks be to God.⁴⁰

This letter places the elder al-Bilālī amongst the pro-Occultation faction, as one of those who actively broadcast the existence of a Child Imam who was born before the Eleventh Imam died, in opposition to the claims of Ja'far 'the Liar', and those who claimed that a pregnant concubine bore the next Imam. As such, we would expect him to be part of a more-or-less united *nāḥiya* representing the Hidden Imam, and opposing Ja'far. Instead, we see him opposing Abū Ja'far.

Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl appears in Ṭūsī's chapter on "The Censured Ones who Claimed *Bāb*-hood." However, he does not appear to have been a *bāb* in the Nuṣayrī sense of a figure who participates in the divine essence of the Imam, but instead an old-guard *wakīl* who denied the authority of Abū Ja'far and asserted his own autonomy to act as a *wakīl*. Ṭūsī sums it up as follows:

أبو طاهر محمد بن علي بن بلال ، وقصته معروفة فيما جرى بينه وبين أبي جعفر محمد بن عثمان العمري نضر
الله وجهه ، وتمسكه بالأموال التي كانت عنده للامام ، وامتناعه من تسليمها ، وادعائه أنه الوكيل حتى تبرأت
الجماعة منه ولعنوه ، وخرج فيه من صاحب الزمان عليه السلام ما هو معروف

The story of [Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Bilāl] is well known in that which occurred between him and Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān al-'Amrī (NAW), his seizing of the monies belonging the Imam which were in his possession, and his prevention of them being handed over, and his claim that he was The *Wakīl*, until the

³⁹ This may refer to the canonical taxes, or rights in a more general sense.

⁴⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 499.

group disassociated from him (*barā'a*), and cursed him, and [the rescript (*tawqī'*)] was issued from the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zaman*) (AS) and things that are well known.⁴¹

It is unfortunate that these events were too well known for Ṭūsī to relate, for now we have lost many of the details of the story. However, it fits into a familiar pattern of *wakīl* rivalry. The accusation that Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl was collecting and keeping money of the Imam is a familiar story that harkens back to the *wāqif* *wakīls* after the death of al-Kāzīm, as well as the treacherous supporters of Ja'far who collected taxes in his name, but refused to hand them over.⁴² As such we can see a clear polemical intention implicit in this narrative, aimed at delegitimizing the rival *wakīl*, al-Bilālī.

One report in Ṭūsī's *Ghayba* corroborates the idea that the conflict with Abū Ṭāhir was part of a wider split:

وحكى أبو غالب الزراري قال : حدثني أبو الحسن محمد بن محمد بن يحيى المعاذي قال : كان رجل من أصحابنا قد انضوى إلى أبي طاهر بن بلال بعدما وقعت الفرقة ، ثم أنه رجع عن ذلك وصار في جملتنا ، فسألناه عن السبب قال : كنت عند أبي طاهر بن بلال يوما وعنده أخوه أبو الطيب وابن حرز وجماعة من أصحابه ، إذ دخل الغلام فقال : أبو جعفر العمري على الباب ، ففزعت الجماعة لذلك وأنكرته للحال التي كانت جرت وقال : يدخل ، فدخل أبو جعفر رضي الله عنه ، فقام له أبو طاهر والجماعة وجلس في صدر المجلس ، وجلس أبو طاهر كالجالس بين يديه ، فأمهلهم إلى أن سكتوا . ثم قال : يا أبا طاهر [نشدتك الله أو] نشدتك بالله ألم يأمرك صاحب الزمان عليه السلام بحمل ما عندك من المال إلي ؟ فقال : اللهم نعم (فنهض) أبو جعفر رضي الله عنه منصرفا ووقعت على القوم سكتة ، فلما تجلت عنهم قال له أخوه أبو الطيب : من أين رأيت صاحب الزمان ؟ . فقال أبو طاهر : أدخلني أبو جعفر رضي الله عنه إلى بعض دوره ، فأشرف علي من علو داره فأمرني بحمل ما عندي من

⁴¹ Tusi, *Ghayba*, 248.

⁴² See Chapter 4.

المال إليه ، فقال له أبو الطيب : ومن أين علمت أنه صاحب الزمان عليه السلام ؟ قال : (قد) وقع علي من الهيبة له ودخلني من الرعب منه ما علمت أنه صاحب الزمان عليه السلام ، فكان هذا سبب انقطاعي عنه.

Abū Ghālib al-Zurārī>>>

Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Mu‘ādhī (one of our companions) said:

There was a man from our companions who joined (*inḍawā*) Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl *after the split*. Then he reneged from that and entered into our number, and we asked him about the reason.

He said: “I was with Abū Ṭāhir one day, and his brother Abū al-Ṭayyib was with him and Ibn Khazar and a group of his companions, when a servant (*ghulām*) entered and said, “Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī is at the door.” The group all were frightened because of that and denied him [entry] as a few moments went by.

Then [Abū Ṭāhir] said, “[Let him] enter.”

And Abū Ja‘far entered (RAA) and Abū Ṭāhir and the group stood for him, and he sat at the head of the gathering and Abū Ṭāhir sat like someone sitting in audience before him, and [Abū Ja‘far] waited until they quietened down, then he said, "Oh Abū Ṭāhir, I adjure you by God, did not the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) order you to carry the money in your possession to me?"

And [Abū Ṭāhir] replied, "Yes, by God."

And Abū Ja‘far stood (RAA) to depart and a silence fell upon the people, and when he left them his brother Abū al-Ṭayyib said: "From where did you see the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*)?"

And Abū Ṭāhir replied, "Abū Ja‘far made me enter one of his houses and [the Imam] appeared high above at a high point in his house, and ordered me to transport what was in my possession to him”.

And Abū al-Ṭayyib said, "And how did you know that he was the Lord of the Age?" (AS) He said, "Fear of him fell upon me and awe towards him entered me from which I knew that he was the Lord of the Age (AS)."

And that was the reason for my cutting myself off from [Abū Ṭāhir.]⁴³

This report shows clear signs of apologetic rewriting in order to wholly defuse the dangers implicit in al-Bilālī’s counter-claims, but we can extract some information regarding the split between the followers of Abū Ja‘far and Abū Ṭāhir al-Bilālī. Crucially, it appears from this report to have revolved around control of the community finances. It seems unlikely that Abū Ṭāhir would really have admitted before his followers that the Hidden Imam had ordered him to send money to Abū Ja‘far. For our purposes, however, the report is interesting in that it corroborates the fact that Abū Ṭāhir was holding on to money in his possession, and that he had a group of supporters, a faction in opposition to Abū Ja‘far’s faction, rather than just being a lonely renegade. The initial statement that, “there was a man from our companions who joined Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl after the split” gives a sense that the split between the followers of Abū Ja‘far and al-Bilālī was a recognized historical moment that was defining for the community at this stage.

No doctrinal contention appears in this report, and indeed Abū Ṭāhir admits to the existence of the Hidden Imam, but we do have a report in Ṭūsī that gestures towards the existence of a doctrinal dimension to the split with Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl:

⁴³ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 248-9.

الحسين بن عبيد الله ، عن أبي عبد الله الحسين بن علي بن سفيان البزوفري رحمه الله ، قال : حدثني الشيخ أبو القاسم الحسين بن روح رضي الله عنه قال : اختلف أصحابنا في التفويض وغيره ، فمضيت إلى أبي طاهر بن بلال في أيام استقامته فعرفته الخلف ، فقال : أخرني فأخرته أياما فعدت إليه فأخرج إلي حديثا باسناده إلى أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال : إذا أراد [الله] أمرا عرضه على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم ، ثم أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام [وسائر الأنمة] واحدا بعد واحد إلى (أن) ينتهي إلى صاحب الزمان عليه السلام ثم يخرج إلى الدنيا ، وإذا أراد الملائكة أن يرفعوا إلى الله عز وجل عملا عرض على صاحب الزمان عليه السلام ، ثم (يخرج) (8) على واحد [بعد] واحد إلى أن يعرض على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم ، ثم يعرض على الله عز وجل فما نزل من الله فعلى أيديهم ، وما عرج إلى الله فعلى أيديهم ، وما استغنوا عن الله عز وجل طرفة عين.

Al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Ubayd Allāh

Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Sufyān al-Bazūfarī

Al-Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ said: Our companions differed about *tafwīd* and other things, and I went to Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl in the days of his uprightness (*ayyām istiḳāmatihi*) and I informed him of the split, and he said, “Give me some time.”

So I delayed a few days, then I returned to him and he issued a hadith for me with its *isnād* reaching to Abū ‘Abd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] (AS): He said, If He [God] wanted something He presents it to the Prophet of God, (SAAS) then the Commander of the Faithful, (AS), [and the rest of the Imams]⁴⁴ one by one until He reaches the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*), then it emerges into the world, and if the angels want to raise a deed to God (AJ)⁴⁵ they present it to the Lord of the Age (AS), then, it goes up one by one until he presents it to God's Prophet, then he presents it to God (AJ), and what

⁴⁴ Here I am following the editorial comment in the edition of Tūsī's *Ghayba* edited by ‘Abbad Allāh Ṭihrānī and ‘Ali Aḥmad Naṣiḥ (Qumm: Mu’assasat al-Ma‘ārif al-Islāmiya, 1991), 387.

⁴⁵ Presumably in order to record the deeds of men in order to account for them towards judgement.

descends from God is in their hands, and what ascends to God, that is in their hands, and they are not self-sufficient, independent of God for the wink of an eye.⁴⁶

This is a crucial report in that it suggests a doctrinal basis for the early splits in the Occultation faction. Here Ibn Bilāl, “in the days of his uprightness” is seen to produce a hadith that supports a moderate form of *tafwīd*, or delegation to the Imams.⁴⁷ Ibn Bilāl wants to emphasize that though God entrusts his commands and affairs (*amr*) to the Imams, they are never self-sufficiently independent of him. God’s delegation to the Imams appears to be through a cosmological hierarchy that emphasizes the primacy of the Prophet and ‘Alī before the other Imams. Thus, the Hidden Imam, or Lord of the Age, as he is called here, is dependent upon the Imams that preceded him for contact to God. The fact that Ibn Rawḥ quotes this as a hadith from someone in the state of uprightness suggests that this represented a mainstream opinion in the Occultation faction of the Envoys. It also shows that Ibn Bilāl was considered as trustworthy in doctrinal matters before the split. This may suggest that after the split he erred into more purely delegationist or gnostic positions, but it is hard to say this for sure. Instead, all we can be sure of is that a split did happen, and it may have had some doctrinal basis, but the main focus appears to be on the appropriation of canonical taxes and other money.

This split, then, is not between the followers of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ and others, not a reference to the split into fourteen factions mentioned by Nawbakhtī, but rather a split at the heart of the Occultation faction itself, centered upon legitimate *wikāla* representation of the Hidden Imam, and the concurrent fiscal authority rather than doctrinal issues. This indicates for us that the Perplexity resultant from the *interregnum* must indeed have been fierce. It thus

⁴⁶ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 241.

⁴⁷ See Modarressi on *tafwīd*, *Crisis*, 19-51. My thanks to Rodrigo Adem for several illuminating discussions about *tafwīd*, including this passage.

complicates Abū Sahl's idea of a break between the period of the *nāḥiya* and the rescripts, followed by the period of a single *wakīl* and then the hidden *wakīl*. Here, Abū Ṭāhir, a member of the old guard, is seen to be contesting the *wakīlate* with a member of the younger generation, Abū Ja'far. This does not mean we have to reject the idea of a generational split, but it appears that it was not clean. Even before the deaths of the old guard, Abū Ja'far was asserting his authority in some way, and this authority was denied by members of the older generation.

7.9 The rise of Abū Ja'far

7.9.1 The hidden *bāb* of the Hidden Imam

Abū Sahl indicates that there was a rupture after the deaths of all the old guard. Abū Ja'far, was, as we have seen in Chapter 5, a member of the younger generations, for he died in 305/917, after Abū Sahl had written the *Tanbīh*. The idea of a hidden man who mediated for the Hidden Imam indicates a period of *interregnum* in which the possession of authority was unclear, which occurred well after the death of the Eleventh Imam, around 280/893-290/903. Is there any way of making sense of this hidden *wakīl* or *bāb* based on our other sources? Was he a real figure, or just a theological abstraction created by Abū Sahl or another theologian in order to establish the continued existence of the Hidden Imam? Was he hidden in the same way that the Hidden Imam was hidden, or was he merely operating under conditions of secrecy? One further clue exists in the *Tanbīh*:

وله إلى هذا الوقت من يدعي من شيعته الثقات المستورين أنه باب إليه وسبب يؤدي عنه إلى شيعته أمره ونهيه

And [the Imam] has, up until this time, someone among his Shi‘a, the hidden reliable ones (*al-thiqāt al-mastūrīn*), who claims that he is a gateway (*bāb*) to him and a connection (*sabab*) who gives his commands and his forbiddings from him to his Shi‘a.⁴⁸

In this context, the hidden *bāb* is mentioned among a plurality of “hidden reliable ones,” suggesting that either the early *nāḥiya*, or the intermediaries at the time of writing the *Tanbīh*, or both, had been operating or were currently operating secretly. This suggests a generally anonymous group that was operating without clear lines of leadership, from amongst whom the office Envoys would emerge slightly later.

The belief in a hidden or secretly-operating *wakīl* or *bāb* for the Hidden Imam appears to be corroborated by a single report to be found in *Dalā’il al-imāma*, and another in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*. The story in the *Dalā’il* is told by a certain Aḥmad from Dīnawar who, in a divergence from the familiar tropes of the early Occultation says that he doubted the identity of the Imam’s representative, rather than the Imam himself. The report begins with a typical Occultation era trope:

انصرفت من أردبيل إلى الدينور أريد الحج ، وذلك بعد مضي أبي محمد الحسن بن علي (عليه السلام) بسنة ، أو سنتين ، وكان الناس في حيرة ، فاستبشروا أهل الدينور بموافاتي ، واجتمع الشيعة عندي ، فقالوا : قد اجتمع عندنا ستة عشر ألف دينار من مال الموالي ، ونحتاج أن تحملها معك ، وتسلمها بحيث يجب تسليمها . قال : فقلت : يا قوم ، هذه حيرة ، ولا نعرف الباب في هذا الوقت

I returned from Ardabīl to al-Dīnawar, wishing to make the Ḥajj, and this was a year or two after the passing of Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī [‘Askarī] (AS), and the people were in perplexity (*ḥayra*). The people of al-Dīnawar welcomed my arrival, and the Shi‘a

⁴⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 93.

gathered at my place, and they said, “We have gathered in our possession 60,000 dinars from the money of the followers (*mawālī*), and we require you to carry it with you and deliver it to the person to whom delivery (*taslīm*) is obligatory.”

... I said, “Oh people, this is perplexity (*ḥayra*). We do not know the *bāb* in this time!”⁴⁹

This response diverges from the usual tropes of the early occultation era in that the perplexity results from the obscure identity of the Imam’s *bāb*, rather than the Imam himself. This seems to indicate the context that Abū Sahl mentions, following the dying out of old guard of the Eleventh Imam, and indeed, once the old guard died out, it must indeed have created consternation.

Aḥmad from Dīnawar agrees to carry their money and attempt to find the Imam’s representative, here using the word ‘deputy’ as synonymous with the *bāb* he had mentioned previously:

فلما وردت بغداد لم يكن لي همة غير البحث عن أشير إليه بالنيابة ، فقيل لي : إن ها هنا رجلا يعرف بالباقطاني يدعي بالنيابة ، وآخر يعرف بإسحاق الأحمر يدعي بالنيابة ، وآخر يعرف بأبي جعفر العمري يدعي بالنيابة

And when I reached Baghdad I had no concern but to search for the one who was indicated for the office of deputy (*‘amman ushīra ilayhi bi-al-niyāba*).

And it was said to me: “There is a man known as al-Bāqīṭānī who claims the deputyship (*niyāba*). And another known as Ishāq al-Aḥmar claims deputyship, and another known as Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī claims deputyship.”⁵⁰

Again, this diverges from the more standard Twelver narratives favored by Ibn Bābūya and Ṭūsī as it places the choice of Abū Ja‘far as deputy among a number of other candidates, notably the *ghulāt* claimant Ishāq al-Aḥmar who also appears to have contested authority with Ibn Nuṣayr.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibn Rustum, *Dalā‘il*, 519-20.

⁵⁰ Ibn Rustum, *Dalā‘il*, 520.

⁵¹ See above.

This mention of *ghulātī-bābī* claimants also makes sense in the context of the focus, not on the identity of the Imam, but on the figure of the *bāb*, for *bābī* groups often appear to have placed more stock on the more direct guidance they received from their *bābs* than the more distant leadership of their Imams. The descriptions of the claimants to the deputyship of the Imam have clearly been made to fit literary archetypes, but it is possible that they may also contain the memory of relative ages and social stations:

قال : فبدأت بالباقطني ، فصرت إليه ، فوجدته شيخا بهيا ، له مروءة ظاهرة ، وفرس عربي ، وغلما ن كثير ،
ويجتمع عنده الناس يتناظرون

He said: So I started with al-Bāqīṭānī, and I went to him, and I found him to be a handsome old man (*shaykh bahī*), who had an obvious chivalry of manner (*murū`a zāhira*), Arabian horses, and many servants, around whom were gathered people showing off (*yatazāharūna*).⁵²

Al-Bāqīṭānī is asked for a proof, but is unable to produce one, and so Aḥmad from Dīnawar goes on to Ishāq al-Aḥmar:

قال : فصرت إلى إسحاق الأحمر ، فوجدته شابا نظيفا ، منزله أكبر من منزل الباقطني ، وفرسه ولباسه ومروءته
أسرى ، وغلما نة أكثر من غلما نة ، ويجمع عنده من الناس أكثر مما يجمعون عند الباقطني

He said: So I went to Ishāq al-Aḥmar, and I found him to be a clean youth (*shābb nazīf*), whose house (*manzil*) was larger than the house of al-Bāqīṭānī, and his horses and his clothes and his chivalry (*murū`a*) were yet nobler (*asrā*), and his servants were more numerous than the other's servants, and more people gathered by him than gathered at al-Bāqīṭānī.⁵³

⁵² Ibn Rustum, *Dalā`il*, 520.

⁵³ Ibn Rustum, *Dalā`il*, 521.

But Ishāq al-Aḥmar, too, is unable to provide a proof, and Aḥmad proceeds to the third possible

bāb:

قال : فصرت إلى أبي جعفر العمري ، فوجدته شيخا متواضعا ، عليه مبطنة بيضاء ، قاعد على لبد ، في بيت صغير ، ليس له غلمان ، ولا له من المروة والفرس ما وجدت لغيره . قال : فسلمت ، فرد جوابي ، وأدناي ، وبسط مني ، ثم سألتني عن حالي ، فعرفته أنني وافيت من الجبل ، وحملت مالا . قال : فقال : إن أحببت أن تصل هذا الشيء إلى من يجب أن يصل إليه يجب أن تخرج إلى سر من رأى ، وتسال دار ابن الرضا ، وعن فلان بن فلان الوكيل - وكانت دار ابن الرضا عامرة بأهلها - فإنك تجد هناك ما تريد . قال : فخرجت من عنده ، ومضيت نحو سر من رأى ، وصرت إلى دار ابن الرضا ، وسألت عن الوكيل ، فذكر البواب أنه مشغل في الدار ، وأنه يخرج أنفا ، فقعدت على الباب أنتظر خروجه ، فخرج بعد ساعة ، فقامت وسلمت عليه ، وأخذ بيدي إلى بيت كان له ، وسألتني عن حالي ، وعما وردت له ، فعرفته أنني حملت شيئا من المال من ناحية الجبل ، وأحتاج أن أسلمه بحجة . قال : فقال : نعم . ثم قدم إلي طعاما ، وقال لي : تغدى بهذا واسترح ، فإنك تعب ، وإن بيننا وبين صلاة الأولى ساعة ، فإني أحمل إليك ما تريد . قال : فأكلت ونمت ، فلما كان وقت الصلاة نهضت وصليت ، وذهبت إلى المشرفة ، فاغتسلت وانصرفت إلى بيت الرجل ، ومكثت إلى أن مضى من الليل ربعة ، فجاءني (1) ومعه درج (2) ، فيه : " بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم ، وافى أحمد بن محمد الدينوري ، وحمل ستة عشر ألف دينار ، وفي كذا وكذا صرة ، فيها صرة فلان بن فلان كذا وكذا دينار ، وصرة فلان بن فلان كذا وكذا دينار - إلى أن عد الصرر كلها...

قال : فحمدت الله وشكرته على ما من به علي من إزالة الشك عن قلبي ، وأمر بتسليم جميع ما حملته إلى حيث ما يأمرني أبو جعفر العمري . قال : فانصرفت إلى بغداد وصرت إلى أبي جعفر العمري . قال : وكان خروجي وانصرافي في ثلاثة أيام . قال : فلما بصر بي أبو جعفر العمري قال لي : لم لم تخرج ؟ فقلت : يا سيدي ، من سر من رأى انصرفت . قال : فأنا أحدث أبا جعفر بهذا إذ وردت رقعة على أبي جعفر العمري من مولانا (صلوات الله عليه) ، ومعها درج مثل الدرج الذي كان معي ، فيه ذكر المال والثياب ، وأمر أن يسلم جميع ذلك إلى أبي جعفر محمد بن أحمد بن جعفر القطان القمي ، فلبس أبو جعفر العمري ثيابه ، وقال لي : احمل ما معك إلى منزل محمد

بن أحمد بن جعفر القطان القمي . قال : فحملت المال والثياب إلى منزل محمد بن أحمد بن جعفر القطان ، وسلمتها ، وخرجت إلى الحج .

He said: then I went to Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, and I found him to be a humble old man (*shaykh mutawāḍi‘*), wearing a white waist-wrapper⁵⁴ sitting on a felt mat⁵⁵ in a small house, with no servants, and without chivalry (*murū‘a*)⁵⁶ or horses which I found with the others.

He said: So I greeted him and he returned my answer, and approached me and he opened his arms to me. Then he asked me about my state and I informed him that I had arrived from the Jabal [in north-central Iran], transporting money.

He said: So [Abū Ja‘far] said, “If you wish to deliver this thing to whom it is necessary to deliver it, then you must go out to Samarra and ask at the house of Ibn al-Riḍā [i.e. al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī] and ask about fulān b. fulān⁵⁷ the *wakīl*. And the house of Ibn al-Riḍā is inhabited by its family, and there you will find what you are looking for.”

He said: So I went from him, and I headed towards Samarra, and I headed on to the house of Ibn al-Riḍā. And I asked about the *wakīl*. And the doorkeeper (*bawwāb*) noted that he was occupied in the house, and that he would come out soon (*ānifan*) , so I sat by the door, waiting for him to come out, and he came out after a moment and I stood and greeted him and he took me by the hand to a house that belonged to him, and he asked me about my state, and about what I had to deliver to him and I informed him that I carried

⁵⁴ The word is obscure: m-b-ṭ-n-(h).

⁵⁵ Arabic *libd*.

⁵⁶ This perhaps refers to refined, chivalric manners.

⁵⁷ This suggests that the name was mentioned in the original conversation, but it was omitted from transmission at some point, perhaps suggesting that, like the Hidden Imam, this *wakīl* was in danger and had to remain anonymous for that reason.

some of the money of the region (*nāḥiya*) of the Jabal, and I needed to hand it over to him upon a proof (*ḥujja*).

He said: And he said, “Yes.” Then he offered me food and said to me, “Dine upon this and take your ease, for you are tired, and there is a little while between us and the first prayer (*ṣalāt al-ūlā*).” And I will bring to you what you want.

He said: So I ate and slept, and when it was the time for prayer, I rose and prayed and I went to the watering fountain (*mashraʿa*) and I washed and I returned to the house of the man, and I tarried until a quarter had passed of the night and he came to me, and he had with him a scroll, in which was [written] “In the name of God the merciful the compassionate. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Dīnawārī has arrived carrying 16,000 dinars, in such and such number of purses, among which is the purse of fulān b. fulān, with such and such amount of dinars; and the purse of fulān b. fulān, with such and such dinars” – until he had counted for the purses – all of them.

...

He said: So I praised God and I thanked him for the blessing he had granted me through banishing doubt from my heart. And [the *wakīl*] ordered me to hand over all of what I had carried to wherever Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī ordered me to.

He said: So I returned to Baghdad, and I went to Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī.

He said: And my going out and my returning took three days.

He said: And when Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī looked at me, he said to me, “Why have you not set out?”

And I said, “Oh my Sayyid, I have returned from Samarra!”

He said: And I spoke with Abū Ja‘far about this. Lo! a note (*ruq‘a*) arrived for Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī from our Master (*mawlā*) (SAA) and with it was a scroll like the scroll which I had with me, in which was the mention of the money and the cloths, and he [the Imam] ordered that [Abū Ja‘far] should hand over all of that to Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ja‘far al-Qaṭṭān al-Qummī. And Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī put on his clothes, and he said to me, “Carry what is with you to the house of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ja‘far al-Qaṭṭān al-Qummī.”

He said: And I carried the money and the cloths to the house of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ja‘far al-Qaṭṭān, and I handed them over, and I went out on Ḥajj...⁵⁸

This long and rather flowery narrative is remarkable in the relationship it presents between Abū Ja‘far and another *wakīl*. This *wakīl* is based in Samarra, he is unnamed, and he operates from the house of Ibn al-Riḍā, that is to say, the descendent of the Eighth Imam, ‘Alī al-Riḍā: the Eleventh Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. This is said to occur a couple of years after ‘Askarī’s death, that is to say, during the time in which the inheritance of the Imam was being disputed. This *wakīl* appears, then, to be secretly operating out of the house of the dead Imam, apparently supported by the household servant who answers the door. There are clear resonances here with the servant-archetypes who appear in other early Occultation narratives as crucial transitional figures in transmitting the authority of the Imams. The does not operate openly, however. Rather than carrying out the business of the *nāḥiya* in the house of the Imam, he brings Aḥmad from Dīnawar to “a house belonging to him.” However, this *wakīl* does not receive the money himself, but rather indicates it should be distributed according to Abū Ja‘far’s instructions. Thus, this anonymous *wakīl* ultimately functions in this narrative to indicate the legitimacy of Abū Ja‘far,

⁵⁸ Ibn Rustum, *Dalā‘il*, 521-3.

against the other potential claimants. This then seems to suggest that Abū Ja‘far was a kind of *bāb*, while he was in touch with an anonymous *wakīl* based in Samarra, maintaining the connection with the Imam’s house. We can see this dynamic also in a report quoted in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl* in which Abū Ja‘far is depicted forwarding money to an anonymous *wakīl* in Samarra, while he operates in Baghdad.⁵⁹ This narrative responds to the problems in continuity that are indicated in the *nuwwāb* hadith, which we will analyze below. Upon the death of the Eleventh Imam, believers still expected to send their money to Samarra, where the Imams had been, and where their shrines were visited, often as part of the itinerary of the Ḥajj, as Iranians, in particular, would visit the Ḥijāz via Iraq. However if authority was henceforth to be held by the *wakīls* for the region (*nāhiya*) of Baghdad, instead of Samarra Imamate, then some mechanisms had to be set up by which money was forwarded from Samarra to Baghdad.

This report also gives some indications about the ways in which Abū Ja‘far built support for his authority. While the existence of an anonymous *wakīl* in Samarra legitimates Abū Ja‘far, Abū Ja‘far provides financial support in the Imam’s name to another regional *wakīl*, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ja‘far al-Qaṭṭān al-Qummī. Again, we see a Qummī-Baghdadī alliance being formed through the money generated by the *wikāla* network, this time with Abū Ja‘far as an instrumental figure. It is notable also, that this report has a further narrative appended to it in which Abū al-Ḥasan al-Asadī, based in Rayy, the man who was said to have succeeded to Ḥājiz, also appears as a *wakīl* who collects money and forwards it to Abū Ja‘far. When Ḥājiz died, as we have seen, al-Asadī was said to have been his replacement, however al-Asadī seems to have had to continue dealing with the *wakīls* based in Iraq, upon which the sacred economy was still centered. If money was to continue to be collected, the believers still expected that its rightful

⁵⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 495.

destination should be Samarra, or at the very least, Iraq. This is perhaps why, after Ḥājiz's death, al-Asadī needed Abū Ja'far, and Abū Ja'far needed an anonymous *wakīl* in Samarra.

This report of the hidden *wakīl*, then, fills in a number of gaps in our understanding of how Abū Ja'far attained authority. As we have seen, he was from a younger generation of *bābs* or *wakīls*, a number of whom claimed authority after the link with the older generation of companions of the Eleventh Imam had died out. The fact that this report derives from the *Dalā'il*, suggests that it may preserve something that was lost from more canonical sources, for the *Dalā'il* is an idiosyncratic source which, though not especially reliable in itself, does appear to preserve a reservoir of peculiarities that seem to have escaped the tendency to increasingly conform to a particular set of orthodox narratives,⁶⁰ and therefore can be expected to preserve alternative perspectives which can be useful in assessing the canonical narrative.

This unusual report in *Dalā'il al-imāma* gives a suggestive framework for understanding the obscure details in the *Tanbīh*. Principally, it gives us a way of understanding the mysterious idea of a hidden *wakīl*, as this report indicates that 'The *Wakīl*' was not Abū Ja'far himself, but rather someone based in Samarra with whom Abū Ja'far maintained contact. Significantly, though, in this report the ultimate destination of the money was not Samarra but Baghdad. Abū Ja'far is seen as the first stop for delivering the money, and he then redistributes it to the loyal Qummī *wakīl* al-Qaṭṭān. In this sense, then, the *nāḥiya* appears to have shifted from Samarra to Baghdad in all but name. The practical focus of canonical tax-collection procedures is Abū Ja'far in Baghdad, but Samarra is still important as part of the evidentiary structures that legitimate the *nāḥiya*, which still traces its genealogy to the in place under al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī. This

⁶⁰ See, for example, its Nuṣayrī-style pantheon-making with a *bāb* named for each Imam, and its mention of Ibn Nuṣayr alongside 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd. See above, Chapter 5.

corresponds, again, with the idea presented in *Tanbīh* of an old guard of associates of al-‘Askarī who maintained the idea of the Twelfth Imam until they began to die out. The same dynamic also appears in one of the reports about Ḥājiz mentioned in the previous chapter, in which Ḥājiz in Baghdad refuses to accept money and sends the donor to Samarra, where he is issued with a note from the *nāḥiya* which dispels his doubts over which is the correct recipient of the money, whether the *nāḥiya* or Ja‘far ‘the Liar.’ The note instructs him to then go back to Baghdad and pay the money to Ḥājiz.⁶¹

This report in the *Dalā‘il* also nuances our sense of the origins of the Perplexity (*ḥayra*), which in this context is seen to have been precipitated, not so much by the death of the Imam himself, as by the deaths of the old guard, even the single man who was left after all the others had died.

For a theologian like Abū Sahl, in spite of the complexity and unsatisfactoriness of the idea of a hidden *wakīl* who mediates for a hidden Imam, the need for a rational, empirical proof for the existence of the Hidden Imam requires that he accept the existence of the hidden *wakīl* who issues the Imam’s statements. At this stage, a Shi‘i theologian like Abū Sahl still required that the Imam be a figure who can be seen to be directly intervening in the affairs of his followers, unlike later Shi‘i doctrinal thinkers who begin to make their peace with an Imam who is not only hidden, but also silent.⁶² Thus, although Abū Sahl refers to this Envoy-like *wakīl* as hidden, he relies upon this continued contact as a proof of the continued presence and validity of

⁶¹ Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib*, edited by Nabīl Riḍā ‘Ulwān (Qumm: Mu‘assasat Anṣāriyān, 1411 AH [1990-1 CE]), 594-6. This also echoes the interactions that occur between Abū Ja‘far in Baghdad, and an unnamed *wakīl* in Samarra.

⁶² Though as Omid Ghaemmaghami has comprehensively discussed, this silence was never allowed to be absolute. “Seeing the Proof”.

the Imam, albeit while in hiding. In answer to his opponents who claim that there is no difference between an absent Imam, and no Imam, Abū Sahl argues as follows:

وأما إذا استتر الامام للخوف على نفسه بأمر الله عز وجل وكان له سبب معروف متصل به وكانت الحجة قائمة إذ كانت عينه موجودة في العالم وبابه وسببه معروفان وإنما عدم إفتائه وأمره ونهيه ظاهرا وليس في ذلك بطلان للحجة

If the Imam is hidden (*istatara*) due to fear for himself, by the order of God (AJ), and if he has a well-known contact in communication with him (*sabab ma' rūf muttaṣil bihi*), then the Proof (*ḥujja*)⁶³ stands, since his physical essence (*'ayn*) is present in the world, and his gateway (*bāb*) and his contact (*sabab*) are both known, and all that is missing is his issuing of opinions (*iftā'*) and his issuing of commands and forbiddings openly, but that does not imply the invalidation (*buṭlān*) of the Proof (*ḥujja*).⁶⁴

For Abū Sahl, then, someone must exist who is in contact with the Imam.

By the time of Abū Sahl's *Tanbīh*, then, we see the foundations of the idea of Envoy have been laid, though the development of this institution has been thrown into crisis by the death of the first *wakīl*, who may be Ḥājiz or Aḥmad b. Iṣḥāq. However, as the *Dalā'il* indicates, the idea of the hidden *wakīl* appears to have been utilized by Abū Ja'far to provide continuity and to re-center the canonical taxes network upon Baghdad, rather than Samarra, though some dealings with Samarra were retained in order to fulfil the expectations of the believers that the *wikāla* should be centered upon the house of the Imams there. A theologian like Abū Sahl required the idea of contact with the Imam to be maintained to justify sense of the metaphysical role of the Imam as providing guidance. In the *Dalā'il*, too, Aḥmad from Dīnawar, after he has been sent to

⁶³ This refers to the Imam's central role as the proof of God on earth.

⁶⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 90.

Samarra and received a scroll from the Imam declares that he is again convinced that God would never leave the world empty of a Proof (*ḥujja*), suggesting that by this he means an Imam who maintains contact and provides guidance with his people.

Though the *Dalāʿil* allows us to fill in the details left by the obscure comments made in *Tanbīh*, the chronology remains somewhat confused. According to the *Dalāʿil*, the perplexity caused by the absence of a *bāb* followed the death of the Eleventh Imam by just a couple of years, whereas the *Tanbīh*, suggests that the community maintained a relatively even keel for the first twenty years until the old guard had all died out, and the only intermediary left was the hidden *wakīl*. In terms of chronology, however, we have little reason to favor the *Dalāʿil* over *Tanbīh*. The *Tanbīh* was, after all, composed just ten years after the date it claims the last of the old guard died, and so it is very unlikely that it would have made a mistake over such a detail. For the Eleventh century *Dalāʿil*, however, the difference between two years and twenty years would have not made much difference, though we may perhaps suppose that the basic paradigms enshrined in these narratives might plausibly have survived intact for a couple of centuries.

The cumbersome concept of the hidden *wakīl*, however, did not become a part of the canonical narrative of Twelver occultation, albeit Ibn Bābūya happened to preserve it through his citation of Abū Sahl's *Tanbīh*. The idea of Abū Jaʿfar as a *bāb* who maintained contact with a hidden *wakīl* who maintained contact with the Hidden Imam must have been too complex, unstable and unsatisfactory a structure to retain, and, either during the lifetime of Abū Jaʿfar, or through posthumous reinterpretations of Abū Jaʿfar's legacy, it was necessary to cut through the extra intermediary layer in order to establish Abū Jaʿfar as a *wakīl*, *bāb* or Envoy in his own right. One way of doing this was to make the claim that Abū Jaʿfar's authority had been

established through his father, as a member of the old guard and as a trusted servant of the Eleventh Imam.

7.9.2 Al-Asadī as a supporter of Abū Ja‘far

As we have mentioned, the names of the old guard are fairly well known: Ḥājiz, Aḥmad b. Ishāq, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, and the less well known Abū al-Qāsim ibn Aḥmad the *wakīl*. Abū Sahl gives no details which help us identify the one man who survived them, other than the fact that he continued to distribute the statements of the Imam. As we have seen, the likeliest candidates for this single man are Ḥājiz or Aḥmad b. Ishāq. Even more obscure, is the identity of the hidden *wakīl* who was designated by the one surviving member of the old guard. The mention of the designation leads us to consider the story of the succession between Ḥājiz and al-Asadī, perhaps suggesting that the hidden *wakīl* may have been al-Asadī. However, we have no explicit indications to suggest that al-Asadī was acting in hiding. Nonetheless, al-Asadī does appear to have been a figure representing the succession to Ḥājiz, the most prominently active member of the old guard. Given that al-Asadī was based in Rayy, it is perhaps not surprising that he did not assume the role of primary *wakīl* established by Ḥājiz, who was firmly based in Baghdad. Once Baghdad was established as the locus for operations of the *nāḥiya*, it could not easily be dislodged, given that it was the capital of the caliphal state once more, close to Shi‘i communities in Baghdad and Iraq, and the center of the theological heart of the Shi‘i world, theologies which were becoming increasingly important in the absence of an Imam. Even so, we may see al-Asadī as a figure of transitional authority, not a member of the old guard, but a member of the new generation who was explicitly designated by the most prominently active member of the old guard, Ḥājiz. As we will see, the existence of this kind of transitional authority became important for Abū Ja‘far in his attempt to build a coalition in support of his

own authority in Baghdad. Crucially, al-Asadī is the transmitter of a number of the rescripts which were issued in the Imam’s name by the hand of Abū Ja‘far. This gives us a clear indication that al-Asadī was in direct communication with Abū Ja‘far, and able, therefore, to preserve written documents issued by him. We will deal with the rescripts in detail below.

Certainly Abū Ja‘far replicates some of the features of the *nāḥiya* which Ḥājiz established upon his repudiation of Ja‘far ‘the Liar.’ Abū Ja‘far and Ḥājiz are both identified in biographical literature, and also in Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list as operating from Baghdad, while maintaining contacts with other actors based in Samarra. In Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, there is a single, report in which Abū Ja‘far is mentioned in connection with Samarra. In this report, Abū Ja‘far is described as sending money to ‘the *wakīl*’ in Samarra, in the hands of other men appointed to the task. The money is then handed over to someone simply called “the *wakīl*,” suggesting that person was perhaps considered preeminent.⁶⁵ This report also comes within a series of narratives reported by a certain Ibn Abī Ḥulays, who also mentions the figure of to Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad the *wakīl*.

7.9.3 Summing up Abū Ja‘far’s transition to authority

Abū Ja‘far’s transition to authority remains something of a puzzle. While we assume that he was not one of the old guard, based upon his death date in 305/917, well after the extinction of the old guard *wakīls* by 280/893 as described by Abū Sahl, his claims to authority appear to have been asserted well before the deaths of all the old guard, given that at least two members of the old guard, Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-Karkhī and al-Bilālī actively opposed his authority, al-Bilālī even going so far as to collect canonical taxes in his own right, something which the later supporters of Abū Ja‘far objected to, and which Abū Ja‘far appears to have directly contested.

⁶⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 295.

This suggests that the rupture between generations was not as clean as Abū Sahl's testimony might suggest but that there were overlapping phases in the assertion of authority between the two generations, and that Abū Ja'far asserted his authority during the period of the early *nāḥiya*, perhaps through collaboration with members of the old guard, or perhaps in opposition to them. We should mention that Abū Sahl's own testimony is partial, given that he too was in the thick of the struggle to determine the nature of the community. Thus, it is no surprise that he understates the complexity in struggles between members of the Occultation faction. All he needs, for the purposes of theological argument, is that there should have been someone who claimed to be in contact with the Imam on a fairly continuous basis up till his own time. It seems that Abū Sahl's denial of a publically visible *wakīl* during his own time suggests that either he did not agree with any of the candidates for *bāb*-hood or *wakīlate* in his time, though he was aware that there were still people who claimed to be in contact with the Imam. Later in his life, according to Ibn Nadīm, Abū Sahl came to believe that the Twelfth Imam had died, and his son or descendent was the Qā'im-Mahdī.⁶⁶ This suggests that he stuck to the rationalistic assertion that the Imam must follow the normal rules of human longevity, and that there must be someone in touch with the Imam to guarantee his efficacy as a representative of God's guidance. This would favor the support of someone like Abū Sahl for the position of Envoy.

7.10 The Contribution of Abū Ja'far

While it is difficult to ascertain the historical circumstances of the rise of Abū Ja'far, we do at least have a number of hadith that purport to have been transmitted by Abū Ja'far, which may give us a sense of the doctrinal component of his contribution to the developing Occultation idea. There are three kinds of report transmitted by Abū Ja'far: those upon his own authority,

⁶⁶ Klemm, "*Sufarā*" 151, n82.

those upon the authority of the Hidden Imam, and those from someone else. The hadith he relates on his own authority are often statements regarding the existence of the Hidden Imam.⁶⁷ Those upon the authority of the Hidden Imam are the rescripts, which we will deal with below. An interesting example of hadith transmitted on someone else's authority is one transmitted from his rival al-Bilālī.⁶⁸ This suggests that before the rift, Abū Ja'far accepted al-Bilālī as an authority on the statements of the Eleventh Imam, on the basis that he had been the Imam's *wakīl* before the Occultation. In general, there is no reason to doubt that the hadith which Abū Ja'far relates were indeed transmitted by him. It makes perfect sense that he would transmit from his father and a *wakīl* from the older generation, though the particular instance of al-Bilālī is perhaps peculiar given the rift. An example of a hadith reported on the authority of his father is quoted in Ibn Bābūya:

حدثنا محمد بن إبراهيم بن إسحاق رضي الله عنه قال : حدثني أبو علي بن - همام قال : سمعت محمد بن عثمان العمري - قدس الله روحه - يقول : سمعت أبي يقول : سئل أبو محمد الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام وأنا عنده عن الخير الذي روي عن آبائه عليهم السلام : " أن الأرض لا تخلو من حجة الله على خلقه إلي يوم القيامة وأن مات ولم يعرف إمام زمانه مات ميتة جاهلية " فقال عليه السلام : إن هذا حق كما أن النهار حق ، فقيل له : يا ابن رسول الله فمن الحجة والامام بعدك ؟ فقال ابني محمد ، هو الامام والحجة بعدي ، من مات ولم يعرفه مات ميتة جاهلية . أما إن له غيبة يحار فيها الجاهلون ، ويهلك فيها المبطلون ، ويكذب فيها الوقتون ، ثم يخرج فكأنني أنظر إلى الاعلام البيض تخفق فوق رأسه بنجف الكوفة .

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq (RAA)

Abū 'Alī b. Humām

⁶⁷ See, for example, Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 435; 440.

⁶⁸ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 217.

Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī (QAR) said: I heard my father [‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd] say: Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī [al-Hādī] (AS) was asked, while I was with him, about the report which was transmitted from his forefathers, (AS) that, "The world will not be empty of a Proof (*ḥujja*) of God for his people (*khalq*) until the day of resurrection" and that "whosoever died and did not acknowledge the Imam of his age, died the death of a pagan (*jahiliyya*)."

And [Hādī] said (AS): "This is true, as the day is true."

It was said to him, "Oh son of the Prophet of God, then who is the Proof (*ḥujja*) and the Imam after you?"

And he said: "My son, Muḥammad." He is the Imam and the Proof (*ḥujja*) after me - whosoever dies without acknowledging him dies the death of a pagan (*jāhiliyya*). But he has an Occultation (*ghayba*) in which the ignorant will become perplexed, and the liars will perish, and the time-fixers [for the end times] will be proved liars, and only then he will emerge, and it is as if I am looking at the white flags flapping above his head at the Najaf of Kūfa.⁶⁹

In this report, then, Abū Ja‘far traces authority for the hadith through his father, quoting the Imam Hādī as a means of establishing the truth of the Occultation. It is notable in the way in which it balances expectations for an immediate return of the Mahdi, with the possibility that it will be at an unspecified time at the future. This kind of hedging of possibilities is distinctive of apocalyptic prophesy, and particularly pertinent for a moment of doubt and uncertainty in which Abū Ja‘far was operating. This suggests that right from an early stage in the development of the

⁶⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 409.

Occultation faction, the chiliastic content of Mahdist ideas were balanced by the quietist Imami deferment of the eschaton.⁷⁰

7.10.1 The Rescripts (*tawqī'āt*)

A key resource for assessing Abū Ja'far's contribution is to be found in the rescripts attributed to him. These rescripts deserve to be treated in a separate category from the hadith that Abū Ja'far transmitted for the very reason that they were received as different at the time. There was a great interest in the textuality of these statements, including their handwriting and the process of preserving them.⁷¹ As with any text from the protean period of the early Occultation, we must be skeptical about the historicity of these rescripts. However, they certainly display an epistolary format that is notably at variance with the general oral character of many of the reports about the Hidden Imam. This does not mean that they were not forgeable, quite the contrary, but the rescripts are also often accompanied by details of transmission and handwriting that indicate that their transmitters were also attentive to questions of authenticity which suggest that once they appeared in handwriting, their transmission may have been more stable than oral reports.

Rescripts were not an invention of Abū Ja'far, but had existed since the time of the earliest phase of the Occultation, for example those issued by Ḥājiz. There had, of course, been rescripts issued by earlier Imams. The Imams al-Hādī and al-'Askarī issued a series of rescripts condemning members of the community who stepped out of line doctrinally, including *wakīls* who withheld the canonical taxes from the Imam.⁷²

⁷⁰ Compare with Sachedina, *Messianism*, 59-60, who argues that only after the 'Short Occultation, does the increasing use of the term *mahdī* indicate a move towards a mood quietist eschatological contemplation. Arjomand too argues for the *longue duree* move from Chiasm to quietism following after the perplexity of the early Occultation period gives way to 'the consolation of theology,' "Consolation," 548-71.

⁷¹ See Chapter 6 for the question of handwriting with reference to 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd. This continued to be a factor in the assessment of the evidentiary status of reports in this period, though I have been unable to extract any clear historical information from statements regarding handwriting.

⁷² See, for example, the discussion of Fāris b. Ḥātim in Chapter 4.

Apart from individual requests for blessing, the rescripts have a number of major themes. In particular evidence is the regulation of the system of canonical taxation which was, after all the prerogative of the *wakīls* who took over the leadership of the community after the Imams. In addition the rescripts provide evidence for the policing of community boundaries through theological-doctrinal statements and the excommunication of particular actors who defied the attempts of the *wakīls* to forge unity in the community in their own image.

Though Abū Ja‘far does not appear as a significant scholar in the biographical dictionaries, the rescripts that he issued in the name of the Hidden Imam indicate that he was engaged in the *ad hoc* development of legal theory to meet the peculiar circumstances of the times. If we assume that the rescripts can authentically be attributed to Abū Ja‘far, or at least to his tenure in authority then we can begin to piece together a picture of the most pressing issues he had to face, and his practical deployment of knowledge to meet these issues. If we begin by erring on the side of credulity, we may begin to lay down an analytical framework by identifying the Abū Ja‘far corpus as an object of study.

Returning to the testimony of the Abū *Tanbīh*, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī claims in 290/903 that the letters of the Hidden Child Imam “were issued to the Shi‘a with commanding and forbidding from the hands of the men of his father (*rijāl*), the reliable ones (*thiqāt*) for more than twenty years, then the writing was cut off.”⁷³ This statement provides us a timeline for the community’s experience of the rescripts, suggesting that they were initially issued first by a group of al-‘Askarī’s close companions, and then by just one of these men, for a period between 260-280/874-893, after which time correspondence with the Imam was terminated, according to Abū Sahl. Thus, by the time of the *Tanbīh*, in 290/903, the rescripts of Abū Ja‘far had not begun

⁷³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 93.

to be issued, had not been made public, or perhaps simply that Abū Sahl did not accept them as authentic.

How then, did the communication with the Imam resume during the tenure of Abū Ja‘far? Clearly, even during the time of Abū Sahl, when the old guard had died out and with them the correspondence with the Imam, the belief still existed that there was someone in touch with the Imam. This left the door open for people to claim that they had reestablished contact with the Imam, or had always had contact with the Imam. Given the suggestions in the sources that Abū Ja‘far did indeed maintain contact with a hidden *wakīl* based in Samarra, Abū Ja‘far may have used the claim that he was in contact with a hidden *wakīl* as a transitional step before claiming that he was, indeed, the *wakīl*, or *bāb* himself. In order to underscore this claim, he had recourse to the same mechanism of rescripts and notes that had been employed by Ḥājiz, and other member of the old guard, thus demonstrating institutional continuity. The *bābī* context suggested by the rivalry between Ishāq al-Aḥmar and Abū Ja‘far suggests the Occultation faction may have felt threatened by charismatic *bābī* claims to more direct mediation with God’s guidance. On the other hand, as the apologetic tone in Abū Sahl’s *Tanbīh* makes clear, the Occultation idea was under attack by rationalists who could not see how the Imam could provide guidance when absent from his community. The twin pressures coming from rationalists and *bābī* gnostics would have heightened the urgency to reestablish contact with the Hidden Imam after the deaths of the old guard.

In his *Kamāl* Ibn Bābūya quotes at length four rescripts which were issued from the hand of Abū Ja‘far, and a number of other shorter communications. In these, a number of different topics are covered. I will not discuss these all in detail, but the following list gives a sense of the concerns covered in these texts:

- Emphasizing the authority of the *wakīls* and the hadith transmitters
- Expressing intolerance of positions at variance with the positions of the Twelver Occultation faction, including the followers of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ and the Qarāmiṭa
- Clarifying fiscal issues in the era of Occultation
- Broadcasting prophecies about the eventual return of Imam and the ensuing eschaton
- Establishing the doctrine of the Occultation and the reason for its occurrence
- Emphasizing the continuation of Imamic guidance in this era
- Explanation of events of the last generation, including the dispute between Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ and the mother of the Eleventh Imam.
- Underscoring that earlier reports predicted the current situation
- Revealing a prayer tailored to the current era of Occultation and trial

7.10.2 A key rescript

One rescript in particular, quoted by Ibn Bābūya, purporting to have been distributed by Abu Ja‘far in the name of the Hidden Twelfth Imam, deserves particular attention. Arjomand has drawn attention to this rescript, and produced a translation of it in his article “Imam *Absconditus*,”⁷⁴ but its full implications are still to be drawn out. The rescript was issued in direct response to a set of eclectic legal *masā’il*, including matters of great significance such as the status of the counter-Imam, the Eleventh Imam’s brother, Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, and the illicitness of drinking barley beer.⁷⁵ Arjomand dates the rescript to after the time when Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ died and was succeeded by his son, ‘Alī, in 281/894-95, because the rescript mentions “the way of my uncle Ja‘far and his sons” seeming to suggest that Ja‘far may by then have been succeeded by his

⁷⁴ Arjomand, “Imam *Absconditus*,” 1-12.

⁷⁵ See Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 226, for mention of the *Books of Drinks (Kutub al-ashriba)* that Abū Ja‘far was supposed to have transmitted from his father and the Imams.

sons.⁷⁶ 281/894-95 is the date suggested by Modarressi for the death of Ja‘far ‘the Liar.’ However, there are a number of difficulties and contradictions with this dating. Firstly, the mention of Ja‘far and his sons does not clearly establish the death of Ja‘far. In addition, Abū Sahl’s *Tanbīh* claims that communications with the Imam had been cut off by 290/903, and so they raise the question of how this rescript could have been issued in 281/894-95. It is possible that Abū Ja‘far began of issuing rescripts, including this one, after 290/903, and this rescript is therefore later. Otherwise, we may perhaps suppose that his issuing of rescripts was initially such a limited or secretive phenomenon that Abū Sahl was unaware of it. As we have seen in the letter given to Ibn Mattīl, Abū Ja‘far did, indeed issue some of his communications secretly to single persons. It is, of course, also possible that this rescript was fabricated or generated much later and then retrospectively ascribed to Abū Ja‘far, though the eclectic nature of the rescript tends to suggest it was generated in response to real questions, and that at least the content of it is likely to legitimately date from the early Occultation period and reflect the concerns of the early *nāḥiya*, whether it was issued at the hands of Abū Ja‘far or not. Unless further evidence emerges, we will assume it to date from Abū Ja‘far’s tenure or to reflect statements he issued.

This rescript is also problematic in relation to our understanding of the career of Ibn Mahziyār. The doubt of Ibn Mahziyār, appears to be mentioned in the rescript: “As for Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī, God will fix his heart and remove doubt from it.”⁷⁷ Notably, however, the name here is Muḥammad b. ‘Alī, whereas in other reports about the doubt of Ibn Mahziyār, he is known as Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm. It is possible that the doubt was distributed amongst the Ibn Mahziyār clan, and that Muḥammad b. ‘Alī continued to doubt after

⁷⁶ Arjomand, “Absconditus,” 4. See also Modarressi 83, n. 161 for the dating of Ja‘far’s death.

⁷⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483.

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm had already pledged his support to Abū Ja‘far. If we assume that it is an error, and the rescript speaks of the same Ibn Mahziyār, there are still difficulties. Arjomand’s dating of this rescript to after 281/894-95 suggests that Ibn Mahziyār’s doubt persisted into the early fourth/tenth century, to be removed before Abū Ja‘far’s death in 305/917. This is contradicted by the rescript transmitted from Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār himself in which he acknowledges Abū Ja‘far’s succession to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd sometime before 280/893.⁷⁸ The majority of reports seem to suggest that Ibn Mahziyār’s doubt was vanquished early, after which he became a supporter of the Occultation faction, with this rescript as an outlier. In addition, the fact that this rescript predicts that Ibn Mahziyār’s doubt will be vanquished in the future suggests that the fact of his doubt and conversion was already known when this report was circulated. These facts were probably added to an existing report.

Another note of caution should be added to our understanding of this rescript. Even though it is reported on the authority of al-Kulaynī, from his brother, Iṣḥāq, this rescript does not appear in Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*, which seems, again, to cast doubt upon its dating and authenticity. Again, though, the content is so peculiarly eclectic that it does not seem likely that it would have been fabricated in order to support any particular position, but was rather generated in response to a real set of questions. Instead, therefore, it is likely to have been generated a generation after Abū Ja‘far, employing the name of this now canonized Envoy to give authority to a set of issues that were of importance at that slightly later time. In this case, we may see this rescript as reflecting early Occultation era concerns, perhaps combining issues that arose both under the tenure of Abū Ja‘far and that of his successor, Ibn Rawḥ.

This rescript is clearly directed at establishing boundaries in the community:

⁷⁸ See Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225, and discussion above.

إسحاق بن يعقوب قال : سألت محمد بن عثمان العمري رضي الله عنه أن يوصل لي كتابا قد سألت فيه عن مسائل
أشككت علي فورد [ت في] التوقيع بخط مولانا صاحب الزمان عليه السلام

Ishāq b. Ya‘qūb said: I asked Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī to send a letter for me in
which I asked about questions (*masā’il*) that had bothered me, and the rescript came out
in the handwriting of our Master, the Lord of the Age: ...⁷⁹

It addresses the split with the followers of Ja‘far ‘the Liar.’ It is notable this addresses a number
of the family of the prophet:

أما سألت عنه أرشدك الله وثبتك من أمر المنكرين لي من أهل بيتنا وبني عمنا ، فاعلم أنه ليس بين الله عز وجل
وبين أحد قرابة ، ومن أنكرني فليس مني وسبيله سبيل ابن نوح

As for what you asked about, may God guide you and strengthen you against those who
deny me from amongst the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) and the sons (*banī*) of my
uncle [Ja‘far ‘the Liar’]. Know that no one has a family relation with God (AJ). And
whoever denies me is not of me and his path is the path of the son of Noah.⁸⁰

The son of Noah is invoked because he is said to have disbelieved the flood, and in the authority
of his father, a prophet.⁸¹ He is thus an example of someone of a prophetic lineage who went
astray in spite of his holy stock. A similar prophetic parallel is drawn for Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ and his
sons: “And as for the path of my uncle, and his offspring (*wuldihi*), that is the path of the
brothers of Joseph.” The brothers of Joseph, of course, both betrayed Joseph, but also did not
recognize him, again a parallel being drawn with the family of the Twelfth Imam, who cannot
recognize his legitimacy, nor see him. Clearly, this shows that it was a problem for the Shi‘a that

⁷⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483.

⁸⁰ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 484.

⁸¹ See Q 11:41-3.

many of the family of the Imams, usually reserved for high veneration, had followed Ja‘far rather than the *nāḥiya*, and this had to be explained. The rescript also addresses a polemic against members of the community who were claiming the immediate return of the Hidden Imam, stating that the emergence of relief (*zuhūr al-faraj*) will be whenever God chooses, and that those who fix times for this event (*al-waqqātūn*) are liars. This would seem to align with Arjomand’s dating for this rescript, at it would seem to be a reference to those who believed that he would emerge when he was around thirty years old, or at least before his fortieth birthday, therefore sometime between 285/908 to 300/913 depending on which birth date was believed.⁸²

The rescript continues to emphasize both the authority of the *wakīls* and the authority of the hadith transmitters. The authority of the transmitters of hadith is underscored using the language of Proof (*hujja*) which was often reserved for the Imams themselves: “As for new events refer to the transmitters of our hadith about them—for they are my proof (*hujja*) to you, and I am God's Proof (*hujja*) to them.”⁸³

وأما محمد بن عثمان العمري - رضي الله عنه وعن أبيه من قبل - فإنه ثقتي و كتابه كتابي

And as for [Abū Ja‘far] Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī (May God have be pleased with him and with his father before him) - he is my reliable one (*thiqa*) and his book is my book.⁸⁴

This clearly links to the *thiqa* hadith, in its various forms, though the mention of “his book” is interesting, and evokes the transmission of Imamic wisdom in various written documents.

The rescript goes on to curse the followers of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, presumably referring to the Qarāmiṭa, expressing a rather striking disassociation:

⁸² See Modarressi, *Crisis*, 847.

⁸³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 484.

⁸⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 484.

وأما أبو الخطاب محمد بن أبي زينب الأجدع فملعون وأصحابه ملعونون فلا تجالس أهل مقاتلتهم فإني منهم برئ
وأبائي عليهم السلام منهم براء

But Abū al-Khaṭṭāb Muḥammad b. Abī Zaynab al-Ajda‘ and his followers, they are cursed. So do not sit with the spokesmen (*ahl*) of their claims. My forefathers and I are disassociated (*barī‘*) from them.⁸⁵

This command is notable in that it uses the same language of disassociation that would be used for intra-Imami conflict, when the Imams or the *wakīls* declared the ostracism of people who had formerly been considered co-religionists. This suggests that the ideas of the Qarāmiṭa were entertained within Imami own circles. Both the Twelvers and the Qarāmiṭa were, after all, awaiting a hidden Imam, a Qā‘im, to return and fill the world with justice, though they differed over who this Qā‘im was. Another peculiar feature of this statement is the phrase “My forefathers and I.” Why does the Hidden Imam need to refer to the authority of the earlier Imams in addition to his own? Is there some sense that the incumbent Imam is in touch with the deceased Imams, or does it refer to a disassociation that occurred during their lifetimes? As we have seen, in Ibn Bilāl’s response to the question of *tafwīd*, the Imams are synchronously in touch, providing a hierarchical chain linking God to mankind through the incumbent Imam. It is possible that this suggests a similar cosmology here.

7.10.3 Fiscal issues in the rescripts

In spite of its eclecticism, the central thread of this rescript carries is a concern for the stability and unity of the community, centering on the *wikāla* network, including the question of payment of the contributions to the Imam. There are a number of points at which money is

⁸⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 485.

mentioned, which initially appear to be in contradiction: “As for your money (*amwāl*), we accept it only to cleanse you. Let whoever wishes, send it, and let whoever wishes, stop. What God has given me is better than what He has given to you.”⁸⁶ This echoes the hadith of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq quoted in Chapter 3, emphasizing the ritual function of the canonical taxes to cleanse their donors,⁸⁷ and the fact that the Imam does not collect the wealth of his followers out of personal financial gain. The word money (*amwāl*) here might refer to any kind of contribution or even non-monetary wealth that might be sent to the Imam, though the purificatory function suggests the category of *zakāt* in particular. This kind of granting of a dispensation is echoed further down the rescript, where it is stated,

وأما ندامة قوم قد شكوا في دين الله عز وجل على ما وصلونا به... ولا حاجة في صلة الشاكين

“And as for the regret of a faction who have doubted the religion of God (AJ), regarding what they have delivered to us... there is no need for gifts from the doubters.”⁸⁸

In this instance, then, it appears that a group of Imamis were uncertain, unsure about whether or not to deliver their taxes to the *nāḥiya*. The rescript repudiates any contribution from these people, emphasizing the importance of the acknowledgement of the Imam of the Age. Thus, while the *nāḥiya* may seem to be granting a dispensation here, there is also an emphasis upon the ongoing purificatory function of canonical taxes, and the importance of acknowledging the true Imam. While the gifts of the unbelievers are not needed by the Imam, the implication is that true believers will want to continue in giving gifts.

⁸⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 484.

⁸⁷ Ritual purity related to the canonical taxes is emphasized in several other clauses in the rescript.

⁸⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 485.

In the following quotation, a more specific statement is made about the *khums* category of canonical tax:

وأما الخمس فقد أبيع لشيعتنا وجعلوا منه في حل إلى وقت ظهور أمرنا لتطيب ولادتهم ولا تخبث

As for the *khums*, a dispensation is granted for our Shi‘a: They have been absolved of the responsibility for it until the time of the emergence of our affair (*ju‘ilū fī ḥillin minhu ilā waqt ḡuhūr amrinā*) so that their births should remain clean and not be abhorrent.⁸⁹

Again, this statement echoes earlier hadith of the Imams in which a dispensation was granted to the believers. Here, however, it appears to be permanent, at least until the return of the Hidden Imam.

These statements reflect Abū Ja‘far’s ongoing attempt to stabilize the community and redefine the institutions that shaped it, maintaining the operations of the *wikāla* network, but on the basis of a less vigorously enforced fiscal standard. The slackening of payment to the Imam is mentioned three times, in one case with general reference to all contributions, *amwāl*, due to the Imam which might refer to *zakāt*, *khums*, *ṣadaqa*, *waqf* endowments gifts and other non-canonical kinds of contributions; in another case, it is made clear that canonical taxes from doubters are not valued; and in a further case, a specific mention is dedicated to the *khums*, which is declared a dispensation for the Shi‘a. The purifying characteristic of payments to the Imam is re-emphasized, but in this case, the implication is that if the Shi‘a spend the *khums* themselves, they do not thereby step into impurity. Note that this is not the language of the *khums* being declared lapsed, (*sāqit*) around which discussions revolve in the fifth/eleventh century onwards.⁹⁰ Instead it is couched in the language of earlier Imams. The phrase “they have

⁸⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 485.

⁹⁰ See Calder, “*Khums*.”

been absolved of responsibility” echoes earlier Imamic statements regarding *khums*, quoted in Chapter 3 granting a dispensation regarding the payment of *khums*. While these earlier dispensations could be lifted by later Imamic decrees, this rescript indicates that this will be permanent. Given the difficulties in enforcing payment of the canonical taxes that we see as soon as the *wakīls* of the early *nāḥiya* attempted to collect them, the dispensations in these statements suggest that a laxer standard for the collection of taxes had become necessary. It must have become especially difficult to collect taxes once the old guard of companions of the Imam had died out. Notably, however, while a dispensation is granted both for the *khums* and the payment of donations to the Imam in general, (*amwāl*), a total rupture in the system is not envisaged. Instead it is declared: “let whoever wishes, send it, and let whoever wishes, stop.” While payment is not declared to be mandatory, the religious benefit of paying canonical taxes that underpin the sacred economy was left intact, while the now-unenforceable *khums* was allowed to lapse.

This rescript, then, depicts Abū Ja‘far as streamlining, and reactivating a system of canonical tax collection that seems to have become partly redundant due to confusion, widespread non-compliance, and, as we shall see, the opposition of renegade *wakīls*. As we have seen, the early efforts of the old guard of *wakīls* like Ḥājiz and others faced opposition, expressed in the report that, “whole group debated after the death of Abū Muḥammad about what was in the hands of the *wakīls*”⁹¹ and they were seeking additional income.” Abū Ja‘far’s rescript also attests directly to the difficulty of extracting money from the Shi‘i community in this period of perplexity. This suggests again that there was a rupture between the time of the old guard and the

⁹¹ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 517; Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 277. Kulaynī has “Abū Muḥammad” where Khaṣībī has “Abu al-Ḥasan”. It must be the former, for there was not such a crisis after the death of Ḥādī.

time of Abū Ja‘far, and at this time, people in the Shi‘i community, in the throes of the Perplexity over who represented the Imam were demanding their money back.

The rescript also places these financial difficulties implicitly in the context of inter-sectarian struggles. Thus, immediately after the rescript curses the followers of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, presumably referring to the Qarāmiṭa, it turns again to fiscal matters, perhaps suggesting an implicit connection between the Qarāmiṭa and the appropriation of the Imam’s money: “And those who have appropriated our monies (lit. “the ones clothed in our monies” *mutalabbisūn bi-amwālīnā*) will only be eating hellfire.” Does this suggest that converts to the Qarāmiṭa had misappropriated Imami money? Certainly it suggests the soteriological gravity of defection. While adherence to Abū Ja‘far’s *nāḥiya* might allow a certain room for speculation about the identity of the Imam, due to the policy of “Don’t ask, don’t tell”, defection from his *nāḥiya* and in particular the active appropriation of money due to the Imam is seen to lead to Hell.

Overall, then, though we cannot be sure about the authenticity of this rescript, it does appear to evoke early Occultation concerns in such rich detail that it seems unlikely that it was merely generated as polemical tool, though it is quite possible that extraneous material crept in in the course of its transmission. If we accept that it may reflect the governance of the community at the time of Abū Ja‘far, then it indicates a focus on clarifying the regulation of the canonical-tax system. This was done by granting some dispensations to the faithful, while still asserting the importance of the sacred economy to community identity and the salvation of the individual.

7.10.4 The *waqf* rescript

The next rescript we shall address is said to have been issued by the hand of Abū Ja‘far in response to a set of questions from none other than Ḥājjiz’s successor, Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Asadī. This focuses on the regulation of the financial bases of the *wikāla*

network. Again, it suggests that the crisis in the representation of the Imam has resulted in the community taking liberties with the properties of the Imams, both by subtle pushing the boundaries of the acceptable, and also by direct misappropriation of money due to the *nāḥiya*:

وأما ما سألت عنه من أمر الوقف على ناحيتنا وما يجعل لنا ثم يحتاج إليه صاحبه ، فكل ما لم يسلم فصاحبه فيه بالخيار ، وكل ما سلم فلا خيار فيه لصاحبه ، احتاج إليه صاحبه أو لم يحتج ، افتقر إليه أو استغنى عنه . وأما ما سألت عنه من أمر من يستحل ما في يده من أموالنا ويتصرف فيه تصرفه في ماله من غير أمرنا ، فمن فعل ذلك فهو ملعون ونحن خصماؤه يوم القيامة ، فقد قال النبي صلى الله عليه وآله : " المستحل من عترتي ما حرم الله ملعون على لساني ولسان كل نبي." فمن ظلمنا كان من جملة الظالمين ، وكان لعنة الله عليه لقوله تعالى : " ألا لعنة الله على الظالمين."

And as for what you asked about regarding the case of *waqf* endowment to our *nāḥiya*, that is made over to us, but which its owner has need of after [the endowment], well, in that case, everything that has not been handed over (*yusallam*), then its owner has free choice over it, and everything that has been handed over (*sullima*), then its owner has no choice over it, whether he has need of it or not, whether he is in want of it, or can spare it. And as for what you asked about regarding the case of someone who declares licit the money of ours which is in his hands, and acts towards it according to it as if it were his own property without our permission, well, whoever does that is accursed, and we hear his enemies on the day of judgement. For the Prophet said (SAAWA) “The one who declares licit, from my family (*itrati*) what God has declared out of bounds (*ḥarrama*) is accursed by my tongue and the tongue of every prophet.” For whoever commits an

injustice against us is one of the unjust, and God's curse is against him, according to His words (T), “Verily God's curse is upon the unjust.”⁹²

The rescript goes on to discuss issues relating to estates (*diyā`*) belonging to the *nāḥiya* in some detail. In the context of the historical moment, the fact that these questions were being asked suggests an erosion of the Imamic property, given his absence. The fact that the *nāḥiya* was making an intervention on the matter of these estates and *waqf* endowments is significant, because it appears that the question of the Imams inheritance had not been definitively settled, even after Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, inherited the house and property in the Imam’s possession, for the *waqf* endowments would have been made out to the legitimate Imam, and while there was doubt about the identity of the Imam, clearly some of the executors of the endowments had ceased to pay out. Here then, Abū Ja‘far appears to be reestablishing the financial basis of the Imamic institutions for the future. It is not clear whether he was successful or not, though there are other accounts of the transportation of *waqf* money to Abū Ja‘far, and then to Ibn Rawḥ after him, suggesting that this attempt at regulation may have been at least partially successful.⁹³

It is notable that Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī appears in this context of the *waqf* endowments. Given the suggestions of the Qummī delegation reports, we may perhaps understand that the flow of capital from Qumm and Rayy, and the Jibāl were routed to the *nāḥiya*, perhaps in contrast to communities in Iraq. This would seem to be corroborated by the fact that al-Asadī continued to ask Abū Ja‘far questions about the payment of *waqf* money to the *nāḥiya*.

⁹² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 520-1.

⁹³ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 501-2.

Al-Asadī appears as a prominent figure in another rescript relating to the regulation of payments to the *nāḥiya*, this time in an interesting case of direct inspiration, rather than just taking the word of Abū Ja‘far:

حدثنا أبو جعفر محمد بن محمد الخزاعي رضي الله عنه قال : حدثنا أبو علي ابن أبي الحسين الأسدي ، عن أبيه رضي الله عنه قال : ورد علي توقيع من الشيخ أبي جعفر محمد بن عثمان العمري - قدس الله روحه - ابتداء لم يتقدمه سؤال " بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لعنة الله والملائكة والناس أجمعين على من استحل من مالنا درهما " قال أبو الحسين الأسدي رضي الله عنه : فوقع في نفسي أن ذلك فيمن استحل من مال الناحية درهما دون من أكل منه غير مستحل له . وقلت في نفسي : إن ذلك في جميع من استحل محرما ، فأبي فضل في ذلك للحجة عليه السلام على غيره ؟ قال : فوالذي بعث محمدا بالحق بشيرا لقد نظرت بعد ذلك في التوقيع فوجدته قد انقلب إلى ما وقع في نفسي : " بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لعنة الله والملائكة والناس أجمعين على من أكل من مالنا درهما حراما " . قال أبو جعفر محمد بن محمد الخزاعي : أخرج إلينا أبو علي بن أبي الحسين الأسدي هذا التوقيع حتى نظرنا إليه وقرأناه.

Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Khuzā‘ī

Abū ‘Alī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī

His father [Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī]

A rescript (*tawqī‘*) from the Shaykh Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī reached me in anticipation, without a question having preceded it: “The curses of God and the angels and all people upon him who declares licit (*istahalla*) a single dirham of our money.”

Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī said: it entered into my soul (*waqa‘a fī nafsi*) that that was referring to someone who declared licit (*istahalla*) a dirham of the money of the *nāḥiya*, let alone someone for whom it has *not* been declared licit who eats from it (*dūna man akala minhu ghayr mustahallin lahu*).

And I said to myself, “Indeed, that refers to everyone who declares something prohibited to be licit (*muḥarram*). For what good is in that for the Proof (*ḥujja*) (AS), over someone other than him (*fa-ayy faḍl fī dhālik li-al-ḥujja (AS) ‘alā ghayrihi)?*”⁹⁴

And I swear by Him who sent Muḥammad with the Truth, in good tidings, that I looked at the rescript after that, and I found that it had been transformed to what had entered my soul: “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the curse of God and the angels and all the people upon whosoever eats a single forbidden (*ḥarām*) dirham from our property.”

Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Khuzā‘ī said: Abū ‘Alī ibn Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī got out this rescript for us so that we saw it and read it.

Here, then we see the process of repurposing an earlier hadith⁹⁵ forbidding the misappropriation of the wealth of the family of the Prophet, and the Imams in particular. Following al-Asadī’s inspiration, it is seen to apply to the money of the *nāḥiya*. From the point of view of Twelver orthodoxy, this appears to be so obvious that it does not need saying. However, it clearly must apply to a time in which this was not obvious. Al-Asadī receives a rescript from the *nāḥiya* restating the old hadith, and it takes a direct, supernatural intervention, from the Imam to show that the money of the *nāḥiya* is also governed by the same rules that apply to the manifest Imams. In addition, al-Asadī’s inspired addition to the rescript adds a further dimension, in that it draws a distinction between someone who appropriates the money of the *nāḥiya* by intentionally declaring it licit, and someone who appropriates this money without declaring it licit, perhaps

⁹⁴ This phrase is unclear. It could also mean “And what superiority does the Proof have in that, over someone else?” or “And what addition does the Proof have in that, over someone else?” None of the options seem to make clear sense in the context.

⁹⁵ This is helpfully quoted by Ibn Bābūya immediately before this rescript, *Kamāl*, 521-2.

referring to someone who uses the money out of ignorance, or else in clear disobedience to the distinctions between permissible and forbidden. It is unclear exactly what the concrete ramifications of this distinction are, though it appears to be also present in the rescript of Abū Jaʿfar in which he states that anyone who appropriates the properties of the Imam will be eating hellfire. Again this clearly suggests that the misappropriation of the property of the Imam, including the *waqf* endowments and the canonical taxes, was a pressing problem.

7.10.5 Issues of doctrine and theology and belief in the rescripts

In addition to legislating on the new fiscal environment faced by the *nāḥiya*, the rescripts associated with Abū Jaʿfar provide an important resource for understanding the early theological and doctrinal processes in the early community. Again, questions regarding their authenticity preclude certainty about the dating of these trends, but the concerns presented in the rescripts do, at least, appear to be potentially genuine reflections of the concerns of the Shiʿa under Abū Jaʿfar, even though they may have undergone some redaction and elaboration. As we have seen, there is a strong emphasis upon the unknowability of the moment of the Hidden Imam's return.

In addition, a doctrinal framework for the Occultation is established. Firstly, the reason for the Occultation is given, that the Imams in the past were forced to state their allegiance (*bayʿa*) to a tyrant, but the Hidden Imam will rise up without being restrained by his having given his word.⁹⁶ Secondly, a mechanism is suggested for the effectiveness of the guidance of the Imam during the Occultation, whereby the Imam's guidance during the Occultation is likened to the benefit received from the sun, even when it is behind the clouds.⁹⁷ It is notable that this is at variance with Abū Sahl's strict requirement that a *wakīl* be present also who can maintain

⁹⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 485.

⁹⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 485.

direct, albeit secretive, contacts between the Imam and his followers. Here instead, guidance is not explicit, but rather more diffused and cosmological in its effect, like the emanations of the intellect in neoplatonic cosmological schemes.

In another report, transmitted by Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh, a certain ‘Shaykh’ Abū ‘Abd Allāh is seen as ‘discovering’ a written communication from one of the ‘Amrīs, which includes polemical and apologetic responses to the key issues facing the community of the early Occultation. These are issued in response to a debate which took place between followers of the *nāḥiya*, named al-Maythamī and al-Mukhtār, and the followers of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’:

كان خرج إلى العمري وابنه رضي الله عنهما رواه سعد بن عبد الله

- قال الشيخ أبو عبد الله جعفر رضي الله عنه : وجدته مثبتا عنه رحمه الله " وفقكما الله لطاعته ، وثبتكما على دينه

، وأسعدكما بمرضاته ، إنتهى إلينا ما ذكرتما أن الميثمي

أخبركما عن المختار ومناظراته من لقي واحتججه بأنه لا خلف غير جعفر بن علي وتصديقه إياه

A rescript from the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zamān*) (AS) which was issued to al-‘Amrī and his son (RAA) which was transmitted by Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh [al-Qummī]:

The Shaykh Abū ‘Abd Allāh Ja‘far (RAA) said: I found it written down (*muthbat*) from him [al-‘Amrī?] (may God have mercy upon him)... It has reached us what you both [i.e. both ‘Amrīs] mentioned, regarding what al-Maythamī informed you about from al-Mukhtār, and his debates (*munāzarāt*); the person he met and his argumentation with him that there was no successor (*khalaf*) except Ja‘far b. ‘Alī [‘the Liar’], and [al-Mukhtār’s] correction of him (*taṣdīqihī iyyāhu*).⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 510-11.

This, then, purports to refer to debates that took place during the lifetime of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, presumably before the deaths of the old guard around 280/893. A certain al-Mukhtār (meaning ‘the chosen one’) was debating with the followers of Ja‘far ‘the Liar.’ As a mechanism, the discovery of a written text from an earlier generation of *wakīls* is an interesting window onto the ways in which Abū Ja‘far legacy may have been established. The reference to the debates of al-Mukhtār as described by al-Maythamī suggests that this report was canonizing the intellectual achievements of front-line polemicists arguing with the followers of Ja‘far. Thus doctrine is promulgated by assenting to what has been debated.

أو علموا ذلك فتناسوا ما يعلمون إن الأرض لا تخلو من حجة إما ظاهرا وإما مغمورا؟ أو لم يعلموا انتظام
 أئمتهم بعد نبيهم صلى الله عليه وآله واحدا بعد واحد إلى أن أفضى الأمر بأمر الله عز وجل إلى الماضي - يعني
 الحسن بن علي عليهما السلام - فقام مقام آبائه عليهم السلام يهدي إلى الحق وإلى طريق مستقيم ... ثم اختار الله
 عز وجل له ما عنده فمضى على منهاج آبائه عليهم السلام ... ووصية أوصى بها إلى وصي ستره الله عز وجل
 بأمره

[Do not the followers of Ja‘far] know that the world is never empty of a Proof (*hujja*) whether visible (*ẓāhir*) or hidden (*maghmūr*)?

And don't they know about the order (*intizām*) of their Imams after their prophet (SAAS) one after another until the Imamate (*amr*) arrived through God's command, to the deceased (that is al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī [al-‘Askarī] (AS), and he stood in the place of his forefathers (AS) (*qāma maqām ābā’ihi*) guiding to the Truth and to the Straight Path... Then God chose for him what he has, and he passed in the fashion of his forefathers

(AS)... and he designated an heir whom God (AJ) veiled (*satarahu allāh*), through his command...⁹⁹

The two major doctrinal elements here, then, are the continuous existence of a prophet or Imam (*hujja*), through a continuous, unbroken succession of spiritual inheritance (*waṣiyya*). The report highlights the fact that the followers of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ are wrong, and that, indeed, there is an alternative successor to Ja‘far ‘the Liar.’ This report has a simplicity of approach that perhaps indicates an early date, focusing merely upon the existence of an alternative successor, instead of a comprehensive refutation of the claims of Ja‘far, and without the more comprehensive argumentation found in Abū Sahl’s *Tanbīh*, nor with the powerful analogy of the sun behind the clouds. This may, then, suggest that Abū Ja‘far initially repurposed extant apologetic defenses of the Occultation idea in order to support his claims.

In another rescript, a prayer with creedal qualities is issued, establishing the doctrinal claims of the *nāḥiya* in the context of personal piety and the seeking of solace in an era of instability. Again, the circumstances of the transmission of this prayer provide us with a window into the ways in which the words of the Imam were promulgated. Note that there is an ambiguity here over whether it is the elder or the younger ‘Amrī who recited this prayer to the transmitter, Abū ‘Alī b. Humām, but given that other early Occultation narratives transmitted by Abū ‘Alī b. Humām are all transmitted from Abū Ja‘far, we can assume that this was from Abū Ja‘far: The prayer emphasizes the existence of the Hidden Imam, balancing a hope for his return, with a refusal to entertain speculation as to how and when he will appear.¹⁰⁰ Here, then, the possibility

⁹⁹ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 511.

¹⁰⁰ *Kamāl*, 512-15.

of an immediate return is maintained, but the believers are also enjoined not to despair at the length of his absence. Expectations for chiliasm and quietism are balanced.

7.11 Abū Ja‘far and the mechanisms of authority

In addition to giving us a sense of the doctrinal positions of the *nāḥiya*, the rescripts of Abū Ja‘far also provide us with some interesting context for practical mechanisms through which he may have established his authority as Envoy after the rupture.

7.11.1 A secret letter

One rescript or letter referred to by Ibn Mattīl refers to the crisis in the household of the Imam, indicating that Abū Ja‘far was still concerned with making sense of the chaotic events that caused a rupture in the community in the previous generation. It also suggests a secretive *modus operandi* which may suggest that Abū Ja‘far’s bid for support was initially secret, identifying supporters one by one, rather than making public claims to the Shi‘i community at large.

حدثنا أبي رضي الله عنه ، عن سعد بن عبد الله قال : حدثني أبو علي المتيلي قال : جاءني أبو جعفر فمضى بي إلي العباسية وأدخلني خربة وأخرج كتابا فقرأه علي فإذا فيه شرح جميع ما حدث على الدار وفيه " أن فلانة - يعني أم عبد الله - تؤخذ بشعرها وتخرج من الدار ويحدر بها إلى بغداد ، فتقعد بين يدي السلطان - وأشياء مما يحدث " ثم قال لي : احفظ ، ثم مزق الكتاب وذلك من قبل أن يحدث ما حدث بمدة .

My father [‘Alī Ibn Bābūya] (RAA)

Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qummī

Abū ‘Alī al-Mattīlī said: Abū Ja‘far came to me and passed with me to al-‘Abbāsiyya¹⁰¹ and made me enter a ruin (*khirba*) and brought out a letter and read it to me, and lo! In it

¹⁰¹ Al-‘Abbāsiyya was an island in western Baghdad off the west bank of Euphrates, the southern tip of which pointed towards Karkh. Guy Le Strange, *Baghdad during the Abbasid Caliphate from Contemporary Arabic and Persian Sources* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 46-7.

was an explanation (*sharḥ*) of all that had happened to the household [of the Imams] (*‘alā al-dār*).¹⁰²

This written communication, which is not quoted verbatim, goes on to allude to some of the events that followed the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, in particular the mistreatment of the womenfolk of the Imam. It is likely that this was applicable to the treatment of Ḥudayth, the mother of ‘Askarī, who is elsewhere compared to the legatee (*waṣī*) of Ḥusayn after his martyrdom.¹⁰³ Once Ibn Mattīl has read the letter, Abū Ja‘far then commands him: ““Memorize!” Then he tore up the letter. And that was a little while before the event happened.”¹⁰⁴ It is unclear what event is referred to here, though given the content of the letter, it is probably something to do with the mother of ‘Askarī, perhaps the bitterest moment of the dispute with Ja‘far. If this were the case, this would place this meeting to during the lives of the old guard, suggesting, again that Abū Ja‘far was beginning to build up support before the deaths of the old guard. The circumstances of this communication suggest that Abū Ja‘far established communications with Ibn Mattīl secretly. Ibn Mattīl was clearly an important supporter of Abū Ja‘far, who later expected to succeed him as Envoy, though was displaced by Ibn Rawḥ.¹⁰⁵ The meeting takes place in Baghdad, the letter is issued by Abū Ja‘far directly, without mention of the Imam, nor any other authority. Thus though Imamic authority is implied by the tenor of the report, it was, perhaps understood implicitly, rather than being stated explicitly.

¹⁰² Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498.

¹⁰³ See Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498.

¹⁰⁵ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 229.

7.11.2 Al-Asadī's inspired additions to Abū Ja'far's rescript

We have seen some of the mechanisms of inspired authority in the hidden voices (*hātif*) that gave legitimacy in the early *nāḥiya*. Such mechanisms provided a palette for Abū Ja'far to develop in his own claim to authority.

Al-Asadī's *waqf* rescript,¹⁰⁶ mentioned above, presents a distinctive image of the relationship between Abū Ja'far and al-Asadī in which written rescripts play a part, but are supplemented by direct inspiration from the Imam which recalls the hidden voices (*hātif*) of the early *nāḥiya*. The fact that al-Asadī supplemented the rescript from the *nāḥiya* with his own inspired interpretation gives a sense of the way in which al-Asadī acted both as a direct source of inspired guidance, and also as a gatekeeper for knowledge about the legacy Abū Ja'far: we should note that the rescript is appended with an account of someone coming to al-Asadī to witness the copy of the miraculously-altered rescript. The *waqf* rescript itself minimally innovative, for it merely repeats the content of a hadith from an earlier Imam,¹⁰⁷ a fact that would have been reassuring to its original recipients, demonstrating that the *nāḥiya* was, indeed, issuing statements in conformity with the statements of the earlier Imams. It is, however, significant that this hadith was reproduced and repurposed to fit the current circumstances, emphasizing that the *nāḥiya* was the legitimate representative of the Imams, and the legitimate recipient of the Imam's dues, as perhaps was still not entirely clear to many in the community.

The remarkable event in this narrative is al-Asadī's visionary adjustment to the hadith. This gives a potent example of al-Asadī's acknowledgement of the truly divinely-inspired status of Abū Ja'far's *nāḥiya* to which he came to be subordinated as *wakīl*. It also suggests there may have been an interesting interplay between the regional *wakīls* and the center in terms of

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 522.

¹⁰⁷ This is quoted by Ibn Bābūya in the text before this rescript is quoted.

formulating what the bounds of possibility might be for doctrine and practice in the new era.

While Abū Ja‘far appears here to be in direct contact with the Imam, al-Asadī in Rayy, is also seen to be directly inspired by the miraculous knowledge of the Imam.

7.11.3 Summary of the contribution of the rescripts

While there is a problem with determining authenticity, the rescripts do deal in distinctive ways with what appear to be authentic issues of the early Occultation period, giving us hope that they may, indeed, be attributable to the *nāḥiya* of Abū Ja‘far, or perhaps soon after. This being the case, the rescripts may be the means of establishing both important facts about the nature of the challenges faced by the early *nāḥiya*, and also the mechanisms by which Abū Ja‘far and others attempted to address these challenges. The challenges faced by the *nāḥiya*, as reflected in the rescripts include attrition from other groups, notably the “followers of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb,” that is, the Qarāmiṭa, the pressure on community finances from this erosion of support, but also from the lapse in payments generated by uncertainty; difficulty in collecting money even from more or less loyal followers. The mechanisms by which such difficulties were faced include repurposing earlier hadith to fit current circumstances, and “rediscovering” earlier writings – perhaps of the earlier *wakīls*, or of the Imams themselves, as well as issuing statements to canonize the solutions arrived at by debates from apologists who were actively defending the Occultation doctrines. The case of al-Asadī also suggests that member of the Occultation faction after the rupture called upon direct inspiration by the Hidden Imam as a source of legislation upon the difficulties they faced.

The way in which Abū Ja‘far appears to have met the problem of non-payment of canonical taxes and *waqf* income to the *nāḥiya* was to reassert the soteriological gravity of the sacred economy focused upon the Imam, now represented by the *nāḥiya*, while acknowledging

that it was now unrealistic to expect even faithful followers of the Occultation faction to continue to pay as ideally warranted. Instead, some dispensations were announced, while maintaining the central logic of the system, and drawing a clear line between such dispensations and outright misappropriation. This opened the door for resumed payment to the *nāḥiya* without criminalizing non-payment and thereby forcing the issue and potentially alienating followers.

7.11.4 Abū Ja‘far and “don’t ask don’t tell”

Our sources present a fairly unanimous image of the secrecy imposed during the early Occultation period. Abū Sahl places this to the era of authority of the single surviving member of the old guard:

مضى أكثر رجال الحسن عليه السلام الذين كانوا شهدوا بأمر الإمام بعده وبقي منهم رجل واحد قد أجمعوا على عدالته وثقته فأمر الناس بالكتمان وأن لا يذيعوا شيئاً من أمر الامام

[After twenty years] most of the men of al-Ḥasan (AS) who had attested to the leadership (*amr*) of the Imam after him passed away, and one man remained whose probity and trustworthiness they all agreed on, and he ordered the people to secrecy (*kitmān*) and not to broadcast anything of the condition (*amr*) of the Imam.¹⁰⁸

This suggests that there was a recognizable moment when the order to secrecy was issued. From our sources, this order to secrecy does not appear to have been first promulgated by Abū Ja‘far, but it certainly continued to be associated with the era of his authority. Even before Abū Ja‘far, it is likely that a proscription against naming the Hidden Imam was established, including, for example, we see it in the *thiqa* hadith which we have already quoted in full above. In this report, ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far al-Ḥimyarī is prompted to ask Abū ‘Amr (‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd al-‘Amrī) about

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 93.

the Child Imam. In asking the question, ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far goes first through a lengthy process to justify why he should be allowed to ask such a question. Before asking his question, then, ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far produces a creedal statement to indicate that his beliefs are, indeed, sound, according to the standards of the time, and a Qur’ānic defense of the practice of asking questions to confirm beliefs, invoking the precedent of the Prophet Abraham who also asked questions about belief. The elements of this creed clearly indicate the foundation of “It-must-be-so-ism” which underscores the continued identity of the Imami in the period of perplexity. The report draws a soteriological line between these “I-don’t-know-ites” and, for example, Zaydis who might theoretically admit the possibility of an Imam who was coming, but not present, and it marshals the prophetic precedent of Abraham to show that asking questions of faith was not proof of unbelief. When ‘Abd Allāh b. Ja‘far asks ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd if he has seen the Hidden Imam, he gets the confirmation he is looking for. However, when he asks the Child’s name, ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd answers him, emphasizing that it is forbidden to ask the Child’s name, and that this is a command from the Imam, rather than his own choice.

He said, “It is forbidden to you to ask about that, and I do not say this from myself, for it is not for me to make licit or forbid, but rather it is from him [the Imam] (AS). For the state of affairs, as far as the Sultan knows, is that Abū Muḥammad died and did not leave behind a son, and the inheritance was divided, and someone who had no right to it [Ja‘far ‘the Liar’] took it, and he is the one whose henchmen rove about [in search of the Imam] and no-one dares to acknowledge anything to them or to procure anything for them: and if the name drops, then the pursuit drops, so have reliance in God and keep away from that.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1: 329-330. See translation above, in Chapter 6.

Here then, the purported reason for the intolerance of naming the Hidden Imam is that it will protect him from the authorities, a reason that occurs in various other similar reports. However, it is clear that this intolerance of naming was partly produced in interaction with earlier hadith.¹¹⁰ Both in past instances of Occultation, and in this instance, the proscription of speculation as to the identity of the Imam must have been strategically useful in reducing perplexity by minimizing dissension over competing doctrinal solutions. This strategy was consistent with the overall tenor of Imami *taqiyya* which allowed for various different hermeneutic communities to subsist within the same broad Imami church, recognizing the same Imam, while holding on to different beliefs. Once the principle of “It-must-be-so” was established, the exact identity of the Imam did not necessarily have to be debated openly.

There are multiple reports that suggest that this kind of operational silence was, indeed, in practice in the earliest phase of the Occultation era. Though the majority of these reports were not reported by Abū Ja‘far, it is clear that he too disseminated reports that established this principle, for example the following report, quoted in Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba*:

عن علي بن صدقة القمي رحمه الله قال : خرج إلى محمد بن عثمان العمري رضي الله عنه ابتداء من غير مسألة ليخبر الذين يسألون عن الاسم : إما السكوت والجنة ، وإما الكلام والنار ، فإنهم إن وقفوا على الاسم أذاعوه ، وإن وقفوا على المكان دلوا عليه

‘Alī b. Ṣadaqa al-Qummī (RAA) said: The following was issued to Muḥammad b.

‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī in anticipation, without having been asked a question (*mas’ala*) in order to inform those who were asking about the name [of the Twelfth Imam]: “Either

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Khaṣībī, *Hidaya*, 273.

silence and Paradise, or speaking and hellfire! For if people were informed about the name, they would broadcast it, and if they knew the place, they would point it out.”¹¹¹

In practice, however, it was also important for the name of the Hidden Imam to be circulated, in part because the name of the Mahdi had already been named in earlier traditions as being the same as the Prophet Muḥammad’s.¹¹² These competing prerogatives resulted in the use of an orthographical solution in some reports in which separated letters are used to name the Hidden Imam: M-Ḥ-M-D.¹¹³

Thus, the intolerance of naming can be seen to be responding both to the preexisting discursive environment, and also to the exigencies of unity in the era of competing Hidden Imams. Explicit attacks were made against groups like the followers of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ and the Qarāmiṭa, but even among the Occultation faction there were various different positions on the identity of the Hidden Imam, including among Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār whose name is associated with the idea that ‘Askarī had two hidden sons, one called Mūsā, and the other called M-Ḥ-M-D, and Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī, who is recorded as having believed at some point, that the Imam of the Age was the son or descendant of al-‘Askarī’s son.¹¹⁴

In another variant of this kind of strategic silence, as we have noted, Abū Ja‘far is said to have disseminated a rescript that announced the impossibility that the time of the Imam’s return could not be known, and declared the time-appointers as liars.¹¹⁵ This seems judged to meet the dangers of immediate chiliastic claims regarding the appearance of Imam-like figures in the near future, ensuring the stable continuation of authority in the hands of the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*, in

¹¹¹ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 226-7.

¹¹² See Hodgson, *Venture* 2:446.

¹¹³ Kulaynī, *Kāfi*, 1: 514.

¹¹⁴ This is recorded by Ibn al-Nadīm, See Klemm, “*Sufarā*” 151, n82.

¹¹⁵ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamal*, 483.

opposition to the dangerous *bābs* who claimed autonomous contact with the Hidden Imam or God, as we see in the case of Ḥallāj and Shalmaghānī, mentioned by Ṭūsī in his chapter on “the Censured Ones who Claimed *Bāb*-hood.”¹¹⁶

At its height, the prohibition of naming and seeking the Imam was compared to the prohibition against idolatry (*shirk*), as we see in the case of a rescript issued to a man from Khujand in the distant Ferghana valley in Central Asia:

أبو محمد عمار بن الحسين بن إسحاق الأبروشني رضي الله عنه قال : حدثنا أبو العباس أحمد بن الخضر بن أبي صالح الخجندي رضي الله عنه أنه خرج إليه من صاحب الزمان عليه السلام توقيع بعد أن كان أغري بالفحص والطلب وسار عن وطنه ليتبين له ما يعمل عليه وكان نسخة التوقيع: "من بحث فقد طلب ، ومن طلب فقد دل ، ومن دل فقد أشاط ، ومن أشاط فقد أشرك." قال : فكف عن الطلب ورجع

Abū Muḥammad ‘Ammār b. al-Ḥusayn b. Ishāq al-Asrawshanī (?)

Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. al-Khiḍr b. Abī Šāliḥ al-Khujandī (RAA) said that a rescript was issued to him from the Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-zamān*) after being tempted with investigation (*faḥṣ*) and searching (*ṭalab*) and he travelled from his land so that it become clear to him what to do. And the copy of the rescript is as follows: “Whosoever searches has demanded, and he who demands has indicated (*dalla*) [i.e. to the existence of the Hidden Imam] and he who has indicated has burnt, and he who has burnt has been a polytheist (*ashraka*).”

He said: So he turned back from searching (*ṭalab*) and returned.¹¹⁷

This account provides a counterpoint to the narratives of the Qummī delegation in which the seekers appear to be successful in their attempts to make contact with the Hidden Imam. Thus we

¹¹⁶ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 249-257.

¹¹⁷ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 509.

see that, even in a report that is preserved by later writers to prove the existence of the Hidden Imam, we get a sense of the perplexing effects of the prohibition on asking too many questions about the nature of Imamic authority supporting the claims of the *nāḥiya* in the earliest period.

The need to proscribe the name of the Imam was a temporary exigency of this early phase of the Occultation, as can be seen in the fact that the naming of the Imam, at least on paper, would later become standard practice, albeit with an acknowledgement of the taboo surrounding naming him.¹¹⁸

7.12 Death of Abū Ja‘far

Ṭūsī gives two separate dates for the death of Abū Ja‘far both of which are transmitted by Ibn Barniyya, one in at the end of *Jumādā al-ūlā*, in the year 305,¹¹⁹ and the other in 304:

وذكر أبو نصر هبة الله [بن] محمد بن أحمد أن أبا جعفر العمري رحمه الله مات في سنة أربع وثلاثمائة ، وأنه كان يتولى هذا الامر نحو من خمسين سنة يحمل الناس إليه أموالهم ، ويخرج إليهم التوقيعات بالخط الذي كان يخرج في حياة الحسن عليه السلام إليهم بالمهمات في أمر الدين والدنيا وفيما يسألونه من المسائل بالأجوبة العجيبة رضي الله عنه وأرضاه

Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad [Ibn Barniyya] mentioned that Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī (RA) died in the year 304, and that he was in charge of this affair (*amr*) for a good part of fifty years, the people carrying their monies to him. And the rescripts (*tawqī‘āt*) were issued to him in the handwriting which would issue during the lifetime of al-Ḥasan [al-‘Askarī] (AS) to [his followers] containing important matters in the realm of religion and mundane life, and in which they asked him questions with wondrous answers (RAAWA).¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ See Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 105-6.

¹¹⁹ Tusi, *Ghayba*, 227-8.

¹²⁰ Tusi, *Ghayba*, 228.

This represents the canonized image of Abū Ja‘far as Envoy, but it does not entirely fit other historical facts we have established. The idea that he led the community for 50 years would suggest, however that he was already the preeminent *wakīl* in 254/867, that is, from the year in which the Hidden Imam was believed by some to have been born. This does not fit either the canonical image of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd as the first Envoy after the death of the Eleventh Imam, nor the testimony of Abū Sahl suggesting that Abū Ja‘far established his authority some time after 290/903. However, there is no reason we should doubt this death date, for it is not contradicted by any other reports we have.

Other reports about the death of Abū Ja‘far focus on the issue of succession, and this is, indeed crucial for understanding the fate of the Envoyship after him. There are a number of suggestions that the succession to Abū Ja‘far was contested.¹²¹ While I will not discuss these here, the range of reports that indicate that a succession was expected to occur clearly indicate that by the time Abū Ja‘far died, his position as Envoy was well established, to the extent that, at least among the Baghdadi *wakīls*, the position of Envoy was expected to be perpetuated. In spite of the existence of alternative candidates, Abū Ja‘far’s successor was to be a member of the prominent Nawbakhtī family:

عن أبي محمد هارون بن موسى ، قال : أخبرني أبو علي محمد بن همام رضي الله عنه وأرضاه أن أبا جعفر محمد بن عثمان العمري قدس الله روحه جمعنا قبل موته وكنا وجوه الشيعة وشيوخها . فقال لنا : إن حدث علي حدث الموت فالامر إلى أبي القاسم الحسين بن روح النوبختي فقد أمرت أن أجعله في موضعي بعدي فارجعوا إليه وعولوا في أموركم عليه

¹²¹ Thus, we are told that many believed that Ibn Mattīl was destined to succeed Abū Ja‘far. Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 229. In another report, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī is asked why he did not succeed to authority after Abū Ja‘far. Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 243. There are various other reports justifying the fact that Ibn Rawḥ did, indeed succeed to authority, and with Abū Ja‘far’s explicit approval and designation, which suggest that this succession was not a foregone conclusion, but had to be argued for. Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 229-232.

Abū Muḥammad Hārūn b. Mūsā

Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. Humām (RAAWA) informed me that Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī (QAR) gathered us before his death, we being the prominent members and wise old men of the Shi‘a (*wujūh al-shī‘a wa-shuyūkhuhā*). And he said to us: “If death befalls me, then the leadership (*amr*) goes to Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī, for I have been ordered to place him in my position after me, so refer to him and rely upon him in your affairs.”¹²²

The appointment of Ibn Rawḥ to the Envoyship united and cemented various strands of the fragmented Imami community. Ibn Rawḥ had links to Qumm,¹²³ to the Baghdadi *wakīls* through his apprenticeship to Abū Ja‘far¹²⁴ to the Nawbakhtī rationalist theologians like Abū Sahl who were becoming important apologists for the Occultation doctrine, and to the caliphal court which provided financial support and coercive muscle.¹²⁵ This alliance of several different strands of the community provided enough stability for a consensus on the Occultation idea to gain ground. Though the institution of the Envoyship was shortlived, dissolving soon after the death of Ibn Rawḥ, it was written into doctrine as a crucial transitional stage in the Occultation of the Hidden Imam.

7.13 Summary of Abū Ja‘far’s career

The Lesser Occultation, as a conceptual category established around 950 by Nu‘mānī, is intimately bound up with the attempt of Abū Ja‘far and his successors to establish a viable basis for the continuation of the *wikāla* network. Non-payment of the various monies due to the Imam

¹²² Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.

¹²³ See Klemm, “*Sufarā’*,” 142.

¹²⁴ Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 229-231.

¹²⁵ See Klemm, “*Sufarā’*,” 142-3.

represented a threat not only to the centralized institution, but it also threatened the spiritual economy of the community. This spiritual economy was, to a large degree based on purification gained through contributions to the Imam, and the receipt of blessings in the form of objects of value that these contributions enabled. The network of *wakīls* tied the furthest-flung Shi‘i communities to the Imam through direct physical interaction with his appointed agents who carried money, letters and gifts. Abū Ja‘far’s claim to authority was based on the reassertion of the *wikāla* network as a legal framework for community life. Thus the rescript he issued in the Imam’s name slackened the now unenforceable fiscal requirements on the generality of the community. Through legalizing the non-payment of canonical taxes which had become widespread, he was able to create a wider base of unity between the fragmented groups in this time of perplexity. This was paralleled in the field of doctrine, by the *don’t-ask-don’t tell* policy with regard to the identity of the Twelfth Imam, which had the effect of establishing unity on the general principle of allegiance to the Hidden Imam, and therefore also to the *wakīls* who claimed to speak for him, while putting aside the details which had already proven so dangerously divisive. At the same time, Abū Ja‘far emphasized the illegality and the danger to one’s soul produced by the appropriation of the Imam’s money, reinforcing his own claim to be the unique representative of the Imam’s institutional and spiritual legacy in the Occultation era.

Though Abū Ja‘far’s can be credited with reestablishing the position of the preeminent *wakīl*, based upon the archetype established by the earlier *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*, issuing rescripts and regulating the community in the Imam’s name. Though he or perhaps people after him during the tenure of Ibn Rawḥ established the idea of the Envoy as a quasi-Imamic institution established through the formal, quasi-Imamic doctrine of designation, we must reaffirm an important caveat. Information about Abū Ja‘far and his tenure is contradictory and shows clear

evidence of later redaction and elaboration. Even though it seems clear that Abū Ja‘far had established some kind of clear authority by the time of his death, to the extent that succession to his position could be expected and contested, his authority may yet have been recognized by only a very few people: the core of the Occultation faction who had not yet persuaded a majority of the community later to be identified as Twelvers. The position of Envoy does not seem to have been very important for Kulaynī or Kashshī, for example. While Abū Ja‘far and his successors were concerned to draw clear soteriological consequences with the refusal to acknowledge the Hidden Imam, many may have considered it safer to sit on the fence and see which way history lead. The doctrine of “don’t ask don’t tell” regarding the Imam’s name may have even made that easier. We must understand the tenure of the early *nāhiya* in particular, and also the tenure of Abū Ja‘far to a lesser extent, as a stage of incubation in which the chaotic environment spurred by the crisis in the Imam’s household fostered a range of maverick solutions produced by small factions of competing groups. The rise of the Envoyship allowed for the consolidation of some of these solutions and the abandonment of others. Many of these solutions have doubtless been lost to us through the process of canonization of the literature, though some are nonetheless preserved and hinted at, embedded in reports that were preserved usually to make the larger point that the Hidden Imam exists, and his existence has been attested to by numerous people. Thus, we need not assume Abū Ja‘far to have been unanimously accepted by the community to recognize his influence.

Chapter 8: Ibn Rawḥ and the attempt to institutionalize the Envoyship

8.1 Overview

When Abū Ja‘far’s died in 304/916 or 305/917, the institution of the Envoyship was sufficiently established to generate a succession process. In our sources, this succession process takes on a theological significance, whose language emulates the the succession of Imams. In a sense, however, the career of Ibn Rawḥ is also the story of the decay and failure of the office of Envoy once established, for it barely survived his death. This chapter, then focuses on the final rise and fall of the office of Envoy.

While Abū Ja‘far consolidated the developments of the earlier generation into a single position, recognizable as that of Envoy (a single man collecting the canonical taxes, and distributing the Imam’s statements and blessings) it is upon Ibn Rawḥ’s accession to the position of Envoy that we may regard it to have become institutionalized. At that moment the distinctive achievements of Abū Ja‘far, and the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya* who preceded him came to be recognized as an office that was to some extent independent of the personality of the office holder. Personal qualities, no doubt, continued to be very important. Indeed references to a dispute of Ibn Rawḥ’s succession suggest that personal qualities and contacts were very likely decisive in ensuring succession. However, if the institution of Envoy existed at all, it can be said to exist when it was passed down. It was probably during the tenure of Ibn Rawḥ that the idea of Envoy came to be canonized through the preservation of the knowledge about Abū Ja‘far which was an important means for Ibn Rawḥ to establish his own legitimacy. In addition, Ibn Rawḥ’s tenure marks the moment at which the Envoyship became a more visible role. Ibn Rawḥ well-connected, with links to members of the caliphal court, as well as his own highly-placed family. However, this greater visibility and connections did not bode well for the institution of Envoy,

for it was threatened by the charismatic *bābī* claims of the *ghulāt* figure Shalmaghānī, whose relations with the Envoy appear to reproduce the dialectic between the *wakīls* and the gnostic *bābs* that we see in the earlier generation with Ibn Nuṣayr and ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, and later between Ishāq al-Aḥmar and Abū Ja‘far. The crisis sparked by Shalmaghānī was yet more intense, as he was initially a close ally of Ibn Rawḥ whose claims to spiritual authority thereby directly threatened both the power of Ibn Rawḥ and the doctrinal integrity of Occultation faction. Thenceforward, the Occultation faction, who we may begin to properly call ‘Twelvers,’¹ ultimately decided to distance themselves from the *ghulāt* overtones which linked the institution of Envoy to the figure of the charismatic *bābs*, in whose tradition Shalmaghānī spoke. It is likely that this threat was part of the reason for the dissolution of the dangerously *bāb*-like office of Envoy, to be replaced by the more diffuse epistemic authority of the scholars.

8. 2 Ibn Rawḥ and the succession to Abū Ja‘far

While Klemm questions the historicity of Abū Ja‘far’s Envoyship,² one of the clear indications of the historicity of Abū Ja‘far’s preeminence was the existence of a contested succession process upon the death of Abū Ja‘far. Most of the Shi‘a appear to have expected the Envoyship to pass to Ja‘far b. Aḥmad b. Mattīl. According to Ibn Mattīl, he was far closer to Abū Ja‘far than Ibn Rawḥ, indeed, Ibn Rawḥ was the least favored of the ten men whom Abū Ja‘far employed in his service in Baghdad:

سمعت جعفر بن أحمد بن متيل القمي يقول : كان محمد بن عثمان أبو جعفر العمري رضي الله عنه له من يتصرف له ببغداد نحو من عشرة أنفس وأبو القاسم بن روح رضي الله عنه فيهم ، وكلهم كانوا أخص به من أبي القاسم بن

¹ For a chronology of the appearance of the term ‘Twelver,’ see Etan Kohlberg “From *Imāmiyya* to *Ithnā-‘ashariyya*,” *BSOAS* 39, (1976): 521-34; “Early Attestations of the Term *ithnā ‘ashariyya*,” *JSAI* 24, (2000): 343-55.

² Klemm, “*Sufarā*,” 146.

روح حتى أنه كان إذا احتاج إلى حاجة أو إلى سبب ينجزه على يد غيره لما لم يكن له تلك الخصوصية ، فلما كان وقت مضي أبي جعفر رضي الله عنه وقع الاختيار عليه وكانت الوصية إليه

Ja'far b. Ahmad b. Mattīl al-Qummī said: M. b 'Uthmān Abū Ja'far al-'Amrī (RAA) had people who worked for him (*yataṣarraf lahu*) in Baghdad; around ten people, and Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ (RAA) was amongst them, but all of them were closer to [Abū Ja'far] than Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ so that if he needed something, he would entrust it to the hand of someone other than him, because [Ibn Rawḥ] did not have such closeness (*khuṣūṣiyya*). However, upon the death of Abū Ja'far (RAA), the choice fell upon him and the legacy (*waṣiyya*) went to him.³

Among the elite of the Shi'a, there was, then, a sense of surprise at the nomination of Ibn Rawḥ. The not impartial testimony Umm Kulthūm, contradicts this account, by asserting that Ibn Rawḥ was in fact very close to Abū Ja'far,⁴ but this clearly stems from a later rationalization of Ibn Rawḥ's legitimacy. Apart from Ibn Mattīl, some in the wider community seemed to expect the succession to go to Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī, as a more clearly prominent and powerful member of the Shi'i community.⁵

Despite the differences in opinion over the succession, the Ibn Mattīl family, as well as the core of the supporters of Abū Ja'far seem to have accepted the succession of Ibn Rawḥ, and when other Imamis saw their acceptance of Ibn Rawḥ it had the effect of ensuring unity among the small core of the Occultation faction.⁶

³ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 229.

⁴ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.

⁵ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 243.

⁶ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 229-230.

The Nawbakhtī family were prominent in their support for their relation, Ibn Rawḥ, as candidate for the Envoyship as can be seen from the fact that a Nawbakhtī eyewitness attests to the succession and mentions a large group of Nawbakhtīs attending the succession announcement.⁷ Upon the acceptance of Ibn Rawḥ, Abū Ja‘far’s assertion of unity had been successful, and it came out into the open, to be a public institution, rather than one that operated secretly. It was not inevitable that the position of Envoy should have survived Abū Ja‘far. There continued to be an elite group of men, known in our sources as the wise men (*shaykh*), prominent men (*wujūh*), the chiefs of the Shi‘a,⁸ or simply a group of men (*jamā‘a*)⁹ who nonetheless appear as important gatekeepers ensuring oversight of the position of Envoy, and who were instrumental at moments of succession, as they had been during the lives of the Imams. The fact that this group could overcome their potential differences and accept Ibn Rawḥ, who seems to have been the outside candidate for the position, is an indication that they recognized the importance of unity at such a moment – unity which could best be provided by a single leader, instead of the diffuse scholarly authority which was to emerge after the fall of the Envoyship.

8.3 The canonization of the ‘Amrī legacy

An important achievement of the era of Ibn Rawḥ and after was the preservation and dissemination of Abū Ja‘far’s legacy as a means of establishing the legitimacy of Ibn Rawḥ

⁷ Abū Ja‘far ‘Abd Allāh b. Ibrāhīm [al-Nawbakhtī] and a whole group of his family [i.e. the Nawbakhtīs] said: When Abū Ja‘far's condition became critical he gathered a whole group of the notables of the Shi‘a, amongst whom were Abū ‘Alī ibn Humām and Abū ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad the Secretary (*al-kātib*) and Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Bāqitānī and Abū Sahl Ismā‘īl b. ‘Alī al-Nawbakhtī and Abū ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Wajnā and others of the notables and great men and they entered in to Abū Ja‘far, (RA) and they said “If something were to happen to you, then who would take your place?” And he replied, “This is Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ b. Abū Baḥr al-Nawbakhtī who will take my place, and the Envoy (*safir*) between you and the Lord of the Affair (amr) (AS) and the reliable trustworthy *wakīl* (*al-wakīl al-thiqa al-ma‘mūn*) so refer to him in your affairs to him in your concerns and I have been ordered to do that and I have achieved it. Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.

⁸ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.

⁹ This word is used, as well as in a general sense, meaning a group, also in a more specific sense which appears to refer to a particular group of influential men.

through the idea of the Envoyship through designation (*naṣṣ*), a quasi-Imamic mechanism that ensured the appearance of the continuity of divine guidance in successive generations.¹⁰ The major transmitters of reports about Abū Ja‘far are either Qummī traditionists or themselves are *wakīls*, involved themselves in the fiscal activities of the network, and invested in the maintenance of the Imam of the *nāḥiya*.¹¹ Thus we see a maintenance of the alliance between Qummī scholars and Baghdad-based *wakīls*.

It is likely that during the tenure of Ibn Rawḥ, the idea of ‘Amrī succession was broadcast in order to underscore the legitimacy of the Envoy. As we have seen, Abū Ja‘far, probably the first man we can really refer to as an ‘Envoy’, traced his authority through his father, the *wakīl* of the Eleventh Imam, while establishing practical authority through building alliances with other key actors like the *wakīls* al-Asadī and al-Qaṭṭān. This authority was well enough established to lead to a succession, but Ibn Rawḥ would still have needed to legitimize his status. This required the canonization of Abū Ja‘far, and probably also, the canonization of ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, who provided direct contact with the Eleventh Imam, and the birth of the Child Imam, attested to in extant hadith. It is no surprise, then, that Ibn Rawḥ’s *wakīl*, Abū ‘Alī b. Humām is featured prominently as a transmitter of hadiths broadcasting the succession of Abū Ja‘far after ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, and Ibn Rawḥ after him, including a report which explicit uses the term *naṣṣ*, ‘designation’, thereby extending a doctrinal mechanism related to the succession of the Imams to

¹⁰ See Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231 for the statement of Abū Ja‘far’s daughter, Umm Kulthūm, on the mechanisms of *naṣṣ* and *waṣīyya* in designating Ibn Rawḥ.

¹¹ The transmitters who report on the life of Abū Ja‘far in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl* and Ṭūsī’s *Ghayba* are Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Asadī, who we have discussed, Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. Humām who was among the “prominent men of the Shi‘a” present at the death of Abū Ja‘far (Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231), Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Aswad who carried *waqf* money to Abū Ja‘far (Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 501-2), Ishāq b. Ya‘qūb who is probably a Rāzī transmitter perhaps the brother of Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, as he appears in the same isnād as Kulaynī (*Kamāl*, 483), ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Mattīl a relative of the Qummī *wakīl* who was expected to succeed Abū Ja‘far as Envoy (Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 498; 503-505).

the succession of Envoys.¹² Once this doctrinal conception of succession had been established, the canonization of a line of single Envoys going back to the time of the Eleventh Imam began to increasingly take precedence over the collaborative cluster of the *wakīls* of the early *nāḥiya*, leading, a century later, to the establishment of the canonical Four Envoys doctrine.

8.4 The Career of Ibn Rawḥ

Though his succession was accepted by the core of the Occultation faction, life was not to be easy for Ibn Rawḥ whose leadership faced many challenges. He had a long period of authority, from 304/916 or 305/917¹³ until 326/938. But his authority was never uncontested, and due to the complicated reversals of fortune at court, several years of his Envoyship was spent in hiding or in prison.¹⁴ Those participating in the *wikāla* network seem to have had difficulty believing that this newcomer was truly qualified to take on the mantle of Abū Ja‘far. Ibn Rawḥ was clearly supported by some important Shi‘is, including Umm Kulthūm, the daughter of Abū Ja‘far, who attests to his closeness to Ibn Rawḥ,¹⁵ but rescripts had to be issued to underscore his authority for the doubters who were initially not convinced of his authority both before the death of Abū Ja‘far¹⁶ and after.¹⁷ Clearly the centrifugal forces set in motion at the death of the Eleventh Imam continued to act upon the community.

8.5 Ibn Rawḥ and Government

One of the central features of the tenure of Ibn Rawḥ was a great increase in the interaction between the Imami leadership and the caliphal court. According to Umm Kulthūm, during the life of her grandfather, Abū Ja‘far,

¹² Tusi, *Ghayba*, 248. This hadith is quoted in full above.

¹³ See Tusi, *Ghayba*, 227-8 for Abū Ja‘far’s death date of 304, and Ibn Rawḥ’s death in 326, Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 241.

¹⁴ Massignon, *Passion*, 1: 317-319.

¹⁵ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.

¹⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 501-2.

¹⁷ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231-2.

كان يدفع إليه في كل شهر ثلاثين ديناراً رزقاً له غير ما يصل إليه من الوزراء والرؤساء من الشيعة مثل آل
الفرات وغيرهم لجاهه ولموضعه وجلالة محله عندهم

He used to pay Ibn Rawḥ thirty dinars every month as a stipend, not including the gifts that the viziers and the chiefs of the Shi‘a gave him, such as the Furāt clan and others due to his high station and his position and his elevated status amongst them.¹⁸

In another report, we are told that “he had a great place before the *sayyid* and al-Muqtadir, and the generality of people also praised him, and Abū al-Qāsim attended [court] in *taqiyya* and fear.”¹⁹ This report seems to be attempting to harmonize Ibn Rawḥ’s greater involvement in court society with the attitude of suspicion usually reserved for interaction with the caliphal authorities and the secretiveness employed by Abū Ja‘far and the earlier *nāḥiya*. A particularly instructive example of the power and influence garnered by Ibn Rawḥ’s interaction with the court was the fact that his alliance with the Shi‘i vizier, Ibn Muqla led to the execution of his rival, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Shalmaghānī.²⁰

However, in addition to the advantages of influence in court, Ibn Rawḥ also suffered for his greater public profile, and he was imprisoned under the Caliph al-Muqtadir (r 295-320/908-932). Massignon notes that in 309/921 Ibn Rawḥ initially went voluntarily into hiding due to fines imposed by the caliphal bureaucracy, at which time he appointed Shalmaghānī as his deputy. Later, in 312/924 when suspicion about the Qarmaṭī threat led to the execution of Shi‘i Vizier, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Furāt, the new Sunnī Khāqānīd Vizier imprisoned Ibn Rawḥ.

¹⁸ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231.

¹⁹ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 239-40.

²⁰ Massignon, *Passion*, 1: 244.

In the same year, Ibn Rawḥ went public with the rescript issued while in prison, cursing and ostracizing Shalmaghānī.²¹

In spite of the difficulties imposed upon him by his imprisonment, Ibn Rawḥ continued to operate in a public manner after his release. As Abdulsater notes, Ibn Rawḥ attended the ‘Abbasid court in his last years, and, in spite of the anecdotes in the Imami sources praising his prudent secrecy, his rank among the Imamis was well known at court.²²

8.6 Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī

Much has been written about the rather sensational case of al-Shalmaghānī. In particular, Massignon’s brilliant, yet idiosyncratic narrative of the political career of Ibn Rawḥ and his contacts with the ‘Abbasid court has yet to be superseded.²³ More recently, Hussein Abdulsater has written an article about the Envoyship largely centering upon the career of Ibn Rawḥ.²⁴

The traditional account of al-Shalmaghānī was that he was a hadith scholar and jurist who went bad. However, his claims to *bāb*-hood from the heart of the post-Imamic *nāḥiya* indicates the potential proximity between the roles of *wakīl* and *bāb*. Scholarly attempts to clearly separate out so-called *ghulāt* tendencies from ‘real’ Twelver do not account for the shared genealogy of Envoyship which drew upon the traditions of both the *wakīlate* and the charismatic *bābs* of the Kufan gnostics. As we have seen, there has been a continuous dialectical interplay between these categories throughout the sources on the *wakīls* or Envoys.

Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī had stepped into a position of mediation between the community and an absent Imam that drew upon two traditions in Imami Shi‘ism: the

²¹ Massignon, *Passion*, 1:318.

²² Abdulsater, “Dynamics,” 323.

²³ Massignon, *Passion*, 1:196-244.

²⁴ Abdulsater, “Dynamics.”

existence of *wakīls* as the fiscal agents of the Imams in their role as canonical tax-collectors and letter-carriers; and the *bābs*: the charismatic spokesmen for the Imam who also participated in some way in his divine essence. As the *Dalā'il* indicates, Abū Ja'far was seen as one choice among three claimants to be the *bāb* of the age, including Ishāq al-Aḥmar and al-Bāqīṭānī. The two traditions of *wakīlate* and *bāb*-hood aided the practical establishment of the power for Abū Ja'far, whose great task was to unite a community that was severely fragmented. In later times, the rationalist theologians made use of the miracle-literature circulated to establish the charismatic authority of the Envoys, as evidence for the continued presence of a divinely appointed Imam in the community. However, the heterodox roots of the *bābī* tradition also posed grave problems which ultimately contributed to the demise of the office of Envoy.

Ṭūsī provides a chapter devoted to the “praised Envoys” delimiting the number of these Envoys as four, following the sequence to be found in his sources, such as Ibn Barniyya’s *Reports of Abū 'Amr and Abū Ja'far the Two 'Amrīs*, which formed the basis for Ibn Nūḥ al-Sīrāfī’s *Book of the Reports of the Four Wakīls*.²⁵ In opposition to these, Ṭūsī provides a section immediately after, depicting “The Censured Ones who Claimed *Bāb*-hood.” Ṭūsī’s account, then, provides us with a vision of church history of canonical figures opposed to a group of transgressive pretenders. I would argue that these categories are flip sides of the same coin. Firstly, because some of those depicted in the chapter on the censured *bābs* do not seem to be *bābs* in the *ghulāt* sense, but merely moderate opponents to the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*,²⁶ but also because the *wakīls* themselves are seen by some as occupying the space of *bāb* in their pantheon. This is in continuation of the traditions of the Imams who carefully balanced the expectations of

²⁵ See Klemm, “*Sufarā'*,” 148.

²⁶ See, in particular, the case of Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-Karkhī, above, Chapter 7.

their moderate and *ghulāt* followers. Ṭūsī's terminological distinction between transgressive *bāb*, and canonical *wakīl* or Envoy (*saḥr*) erects boundaries between roles that were perhaps not so distinct. As we have seen in Chapter 6, the canonization of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as *wakīl* faced opposition from members of the new Twelver synthesis who were loyal to the idea of their own pantheon of *bābs*: for partisans of Ibn Nuṣayr the idea of a *wakīl* mediating for the Imam is seen as a direct challenge to the spiritual mediation of the *bāb*-hood of Ibn Nuṣayr. In making a clear separation between the Nuṣayrī *bābs* and the fiscal *wakīls*, Khaṣībī, and his Nuṣayrī or proto-Nuṣayrī informants were able to accept the *de facto* political developments that resulted in the leadership of the *wakīls*, while ring-fencing the particular spiritual authority and mediation of Ibn Nuṣayr and the pantheon of earlier *bābs*.

Twelver sources mention that upon Abū Jaʿfar's death, the Shiʿa were surprised about the succession of Ibn Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī, and the names of a couple of other candidates are mentioned. However, in general, the Twelver tradition minimizes dissension, instead claiming that Abū Jaʿfar designated his successor through *naṣṣ* designation based upon the Imam's own appointment, thereby conceptualizing the wakīlate or Envoyship as a quasi-Imamic institution that relied upon the same mechanisms at the Imamate to ensure succession.

What caused the failure of the Envoyship? Part of the cause must be that, during the tenure of Ibn Rawḥ the fragile synthesis of *wakīl* functions and *bāb*-like mediation with divine guidance was thrown into disarray by the claims of al-Shalmaghānī, whose followers believed he incarnated God, just as the Prophets and Imams and their *waṣīs* had incarnated God one after the other since the beginning of the world.²⁷ Shalmaghānī would have been well positioned to

²⁷ See Yāqūt ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, *al-Irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb*, E.J.W. Gibb memorial series, 6, translated by D. S. Margoliouth (Leiden: Brill, 1907-27), 1:296-7.

succeed Ibn Rawḥ. He was well connected with the court²⁸ and initially an ally of Ibn Rawḥ. Both Shalmaghānī and Ibn Rawḥ were supported by the vizieral family of Ibn al-Furāt.²⁹ Shalmaghānī very much passed the knowledge test: He was a prolific scholar, whose books were so influential that they could not be ignored, even after his excommunication and execution, but instead had to be rehabilitated by explicit statements from Ibn Rawḥ, denying or minimizing Shalmaghānī's input.³⁰ However, the kind of knowledge and mediation Shalmaghānī ultimately claimed was unacceptable to the powerbrokers of the Shi'ī elite, and after his declaration, the knowledge he claimed was no longer purely epistemic, but asserted through his own embodiment of divinity, rather than the verifiable textual knowledge that seems to have been the benchmark that limited the exercise of charismatic authority among the Imamis in this era.

Following his claims to *bāb*-hood, Shalmaghānī was executed in 322/934 through the influence of the Shi'ī vizier Ibn Muqla, an ally of Ibn Rawḥ,³¹ and one of the last viziers of the more-or-less independent Baghdad Caliphate, before the Amirate of Ibn Rā'iq.³² Ibn Rawḥ died four years later in 326/ 938.³³ Shalmaghānī is famously quoted by Ṭūsī as having mentioned his conflict with Ibn Rawḥ for leadership of the Shi'ī community in the following terms: "We contended over this matter as dogs squabble over a corpse."³⁴ After such an undignified and divisive squabble, it is perhaps no surprise that the institution of Envoy was not afterwards salvageable.

²⁸ He was supported by a member of the powerful vizieral family of Ibn Furāt, (Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 1:296), a family who had also supported Ibn Nuṣayr.

²⁹ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 231. 247; Sachedina, *Messianism*, 211, n62.

³⁰ See Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 255-6; Arjomand, "Crisis of the Imamate," 507, and n140.

³¹ Massignon, *Passion*, 320.

³² Sadeq Sajjadi, "Abbasids," translated by Rahim Gholami, *Encyclopedia Islamica*.

³³ Abdulsater, "Dynamics," 326.

³⁴ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 244.

8.6.1 Ibn Rawḥ had trouble proving his scholarly credentials versus Shalmaghānī

Ibn Rawḥ and his supporters appear to have been embarrassed by the great intellectual output of Shalmaghānī. In contrast, Ibn Rawḥ himself does not appear to have had much scholarly output. In some reports, there is doubt about the *responsa* issued by Ibn Rawḥ, requiring that Ibn Rawḥ had to issue an explicit statement denying that Shalmaghānī authored the *responsa* as had been claimed.³⁵ In order to meet the problem of Ibn Rawḥ's apparent lack of scholarship, we see the later transmitters scraping the bottom of the barrel to show evidence of scholarship. Thus Ibn Bābūya includes a peculiar report in his *Kamāl al-dīn* regarding Abū Ṭālib's conversion to Islam due to numerological proofs,³⁶ otherwise unrelated to the content of the chapter, suggesting it was only included in order as a way of indicating that Ibn Rawḥ did indeed preserve hadith reports. The inclusion of this hadith in this chapter perhaps suggests that Ibn Rawḥ's legacy as a hadith transmitter was not otherwise well known, and had to be preserved in the *Ghayba* literature to prove that he was due legitimacy through the criterion of hadith transmission.

In contrast, Shalmaghānī's scholarly output appears to have been voluminous and important. One indication of this is in the efforts made by Ibn Rawḥ and his colleagues to ensure that Shalmaghānī's scholarly output could be rehabilitated from the stain of his extremist claims: as one report puts it, how should people act towards Shalmaghānī's work, when their houses are filled with his books? Ibn Rawḥ responded that one should act as the Imams did regards to doctrinally unsound scholars in the past: use the hadiths they transmit from the Imams, but leave what they generate from their own speculation.³⁷ However, this rule of thumb did not seem to be

³⁵ Tusi, *Ghayba*, 232

³⁶ Ibn Bābūya, *Kamal*, 509.

³⁷ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 242.

enough, for we are also told that Ibn Rawḥ wrote to the a group of jurists in Qumm to elicit their reaction to Shalmaghānī’s *Kitāb al-ta’dīb* (perhaps an error for *K. al-taklīf*) to see if it was doctrinally and legally sound, after which the scholars wrote back with only very minor technical objections.³⁸

8.6.2 Shalmaghānī cursed and executed

In order to meet the threat of Shalmaghānī, Ibn Rawḥ resorted to the tried and tested mechanism of the rescript. While he was in prison in the house of the Caliph al-Muqtadir, Ibn Rawḥ issued a rescript, by way of his *wakīl*, Abū ‘Alī b. Humām, cursing Shalmaghānī, in 312/927. In the rescript, Shalmaghānī is accused of lies, apostasy, *kufr* and of *ilhād*, and his name is added to a list of those ‘extremists’ who had earlier been excommunicated: al-Sharī‘ī, Ibn Nuṣayr, al-Hilālī and al-Bilālī and others.³⁹

8.7 Death of Ibn Rawḥ and the failure of the Envoyship

Ibn Rawḥ died in 326/938 and was succeeded by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī, who, himself died three years later.⁴⁰ While Ṭūsī preserves reports that support the idea of a clear line of designation through the Four Envoys, Khaṣībī preserves an alternative picture of the dissent among the community:

و أوصى أبو جعفر بن عثمان العمري إى أبي القاسم الحسين بن روح النوبختي و سلم إليه وصيته فلمز الشيعة
قبول ذلك لأن محمد بن عثمان ثقة الامام ولم يوثق إلا من هو ثقة عند الله وعنده

Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī appointed Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī to succeed him, and passed his legacy [*waṣiyya*] on to him. And the Shi‘a criticized the acceptance of that succession, because while Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān was

³⁸ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 243.

³⁹ Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 256-7.

⁴⁰ Abdulsater, “Dynamics,” 326.

the trusted companion (*thiqa*) of the Imam, a person was not to be considered trustworthy (*thiqa*) except someone who was trustworthy before God and [the Imam].⁴¹

This seems to suggest, then, that Abū Ja‘far’s designation of his successor was seen by some as a human, rather than a divinely sanctioned act. The report continues:

و أوصى الحسين بن روح النوبختي إلى أبي الحسن علي بن محمد السمري فتنازعت الشيعة فيه. قال بعضهم أنه أوصى إليه بملكه وماله لعجز ابنه أبي طالب عن القيام بذلك. وقال آخرون: بل أوصى بما أوصى به محمد بن عثمان إليه فطالب الشيعة علي بن محمد السمري بما طالبوا به الحسين بن روح فذكروا أنه عجز عن ذلك.

And al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī appointed Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī to succeed him, and the Shi‘a argued about him. Some of them said that Ibn Rawḥ appointed him the heir of his property and his money due to the incapacity of his son Abū Ṭālib to rise to that. And others said, "No, rather Ibn Rawḥ appointed [al-Samurī] in the [same] way that Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān appointed [Ibn Rawḥ] to succeed to him." And the Shi‘a cross-examined (*tālaba*) ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī in the way that they cross-examined of al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ, but they mentioned that he was incapable of that.

The wording of this is somewhat mysterious, but clearly the Shi‘a tested ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī, in some way, perhaps asking him legal or doctrinal questions as they had tested earlier candidates for Imamate, and found him wanting. The report suggests that Ibn Rawḥ had also been tested in this way, and had passed, though in another report, we see the Shi‘a questioning the preeminent scholar and theologian Abu Sahl al-Nawbakhtī about why he was not chosen to lead the community,⁴² which suggests that, in terms of knowledge at least, there were others

⁴¹ Khaṣībī, *Hidaya*, 394-5.

⁴² Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 243.

considered more suitable to lead. This kind of test of knowledge was also the same mechanism that Qummī scholars had used to exclude the brother of the Eleventh Imam, Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ from the Imamate. Thus Samurī is depicted as having failed in the test of spiritual knowledge, and this failure is associated with the failure of his mundane, fiscal role of collecting money from the community. Both parts of the dual-conception of the Envoyship had been undermined. In spite of the existence of other claimants, the Envoyship was finished as an active force in the community, ready to be written into theology over the next few generations.

The significance of the testing of Ibn Rawḥ and al-Samurī is great when we consider that ultimately, the real successors to authority in the Imami community were. Throughout the tenure of Abū Ja‘far, and in particular, Ibn Rawḥ, our sources allude to a gathering of shaykhs and notables among the community who gathered in Baghdad and gave their imprimatur to developments in the community. After Ibn Rawḥ, the leadership of the community returned to that of this more diffused oligarchic elite, whose scholarship was the benchmark for their claims to authority: Initially the Qummīs and Rāzīs like Ibn Bābūya and al-Nu‘mānī in the fourth/tenth century, and later Baghdadis, especially al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, and his students, the Sayyid dynasts al-Sharif al-Raḍī and al-Murtaḍā who were, again, heavily associated with the Buyid and caliphal courts in the fifth/eleventh century. These later figures were at once heirs to the period of the Lesser Occultation I have discussed, but also mark a changing, crystallizing structure that was to become recognizable as classical Twelver Shi‘ism.

Thus, by the time Samurī succeeded, the Envoyship was doomed. There are few activities mentioned for him, and the report of his succession is a stereotyped statement of *naṣṣ* designation without any of the historical details surrounding the succession of Ibn Rawḥ a

generation earlier.⁴³ We may even question whether he even was an Envoy in the sense of Abū Ja‘far and Ibn Rawḥ. At any rate, he died just a few years after, and the major rescript attributed to him was probably generated posthumously, for it predicts his death, and declares the end of the position of Envoy:

حدثنا أبو محمد الحسن بن أحمد المكتوب قال : كنت بمدينة السلام في السنة التي توفي فيها الشيخ علي بن محمد السمرى - قدس الله روحه - فحضرته قبل وفاته بأيام فأخرج إلى الناس توقيعا نسخته : " بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم يا علي بن محمد السمرى أعظم الله أجر إخوانك فيك فإنك ميت ما بينك وبين ستة أيام فاجمع أمرك ولا توص إلى أحد يقوم مقامك بعد وفاتك ، فقد وقعت الغيبة الثانية فلا ظهور إلا بعد إذن الله عز وجل وذلك بعد طول الأمد وقسوة القلوب ، وامتلاء الأرض جورا ، وسيأتي شيعتي من يدعي المشاهدة ، ألا فمن ادعى المشاهدة قبل خروج السفيناني والصيحة فهو كاذب مفتر ، ولا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله العلي العظيم . قال : فنسخنا هذا التوقيع وخرجنا من عنده ، فلما كان اليوم السادس عدنا إليه وهو يجود بنفسه ، فقيل له : من وصيك من بعدك ؟ فقال : لله أمر هو بالغه . ومضى رضي الله عنه ، فهذا آخر كلام سمع منه .

Abū Muḥammad Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Mukattib said:

I was in Baghdad in the year when the Shaykh ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī died (QAR) and I came to him a few days before his death, and he issued a rescript to the people.

Here is a copy of it:

“In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate, oh ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī (may God magnify the reward of your brethren through you!) You will be dead in six days, so settle your affairs, and do not designate succession (*lā tuwṣi*) to anyone to take your place after your death, for the second Occultation has occurred. And there will be no appearance (*zuhūr*) except after God has permitted, and that will be after a long time (*tūl al-amad*), and hardening of hearts, and the filling of the world with oppression. And to

⁴³ Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 245.

my Shi‘a will come such that claim eyewitness (*mushāhada*) [of the Imam] but whosoever claims eyewitness before the appearance of the *Sufyānī* and the Cry (*ṣayḥa*) he is a slanderous liar (*kadhḥāb muftarin*), and there is no strength nor might except through God, the High the Great.”

He said: And we copied down this rescript and we went out from him and when on the sixth day, we returned to him and he was giving up the ghost, and it was said to him, “who is your successor (*waṣī*) after you?” And he said “God has an affair (*amr*) which he himself achieves (*huwa bālighuhu*).” And he died (RAA) and these were the last words heard from him.⁴⁴

The focus on liars evokes earlier memories of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’, statements about the opposition to Abū Ja‘far, and, more pregnantly, of Shalmaghānī himself. Whoever issued this rescript was clearly highly aware of the precariousness of the position of Envoy, and its openness for conflation with the gnostic ideas of *bāb*, as Shalmaghānī had proven.

Not all Shi‘a accepted the end Envoyship and *bāb*-hood, however. In Tūsī’s chapter on “the Censured ones who claimed *bāb*-hood,” he mentions the case of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, the nephew of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī and Abū Dulaf ‘the Madman’ who made a bid for the Envoyship in his name. This, however, was refuted by the elite of the Shi‘a:

أخبرني الشيخ أبو عبد الله محمد بن محمد بن النعمان ، عن أبي الحسن علي بن بلال المهلبي قال : سمعت أبا القاسم

جعفر بن محمد بن قولويه يقول : أما أبو دلف الكاتب - لا حاطه الله - فكنا نعرفه ملحدا ثم أظهر الغلو ، ثم جن

وسلسل ، ثم صار مفوضا

فلما دخل بغداد مال إليه و عدل عن الطائفة وأوصى إليه ، لم نشك أنه على مذهبه ، فلعنناه وبرئنا منه لان عندنا أن

كل من ادعى الامر بعد السمري رحمه الله فهو كافر منمسن ضال مضل ، وبالله التوفيق

⁴⁴ Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 258.

Al-Shaykh Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu‘mān [al-Mufīd]

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Bilāl al-Muhallabī

Abū al-Qāsim Ja‘far b. Muḥammad b. Qūlūya said: As for Abū Dulaf the Secretary

(*kātib*) may God not embrace him (?), we knew that he was irreligious (*ilhād*) then he betrayed *ghuluww*, then he went mad ... then he became a delegationist (*mufawwiḍ*) ...

When he entered Baghdad, [Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī] inclined towards [Abū Dulaf] and turned away from the sect and designated [Abū Dulaf] as his successor, and we did not

doubt that he was of his persuasion (*madhhab*) and we cursed him and disassociated

(*barā‘a*) from him, because, according to us, anyone who claims leadership (*amr*) [i.e.

the Envoyship] after al-Samurī is an infidel (*kāfir*) and an erring, astray-leading, stinking corrupt one...⁴⁵

Here then, while Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī and Abū Dulaf mount a claim on the Envoyship, but are denounced on the grounds of doctrine, and also based on the consensus of the elite of the Shi‘a, who had now decided to ignore any claims to leadership after Samurī. Abū Bakr had a certain family claim, as nephew of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, and clearly the very conception of the office of Envoy, with its genetic relationship to the gnostic conception of *bāb*-hood, was open to new claims being made upon it without such strict proscriptions as the Samurī rescript which were now being circulated.

Clearly this was unsatisfying to some who wished the Envoyship to continue, but in the face of such proscriptions, other potential candidates, perhaps more ‘moderate’ and therefore acceptable to the core of the Occultation faction, demurred over the possibility of establishing

⁴⁵ Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 258.

themselves as Envoy or *bāb*, even though they may have had some support. Thus, we see, that a member of that elite, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd turned this position down:

وذكر أبو عمرو محمد بن محمد بن نصر السكري قال : لما قدم ابن محمد بن الحسن بن الوليد القمي من قبل أبيه والجماعة وسألوه عن الامر الذي حكي فيه من النيابة أنكروا ذلك وقال : ليس إلي من هذا شيء ، و عرض عليه مال فأبى وقال : محرم علي أخذ شيء منه ، فإنه ليس إلي من هذا الامر شيء ، ولا ادعيت شيئا من هذا ، وكنت حاضرا . (لمخاطبته إياه بالبصرة .

Abū ‘Amr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Sukkarī mentioned when Ibn Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd al-Qummī came before his father and the group [of shaykhs]⁴⁶ and they asked him about the what had been saying about the deputyship (*niyāba*), he denied that and said, “I do not have anything to do with that.” And money was presented to him and he refused, saying, “It is forbidden to me to take anything of that, because no part of this leadership (*amr*) belongs to me, and I did not claim any part of it.” And I was present at his conversation with him at Baṣra.⁴⁷

Here, then, it appears that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd had been associated in some capacity with a campaign to take over the Envoyship, or perhaps claims had been made on his behalf, but when confronted with this, he denied it. The fact that he was offered money is an interesting detail, because it suggests that even then, some of the elite may have wished to persuade him to act as Envoy and continue collecting canonical taxes, or they may have been acting as *agents provocateurs*. However, instead of pursuing claims to personal leadership, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd accepts the new era of more diffuse oligarchic leadership, whose presence is visible throughout the period of Ibn Rawḥ, in particular, in mentions of the

⁴⁶ Throughout this period, the word ‘the group’ (*al-jamā‘a*) appears to refer to a specific body of notables among the Shi‘a.

⁴⁷ Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 258.

shaykhs and the prominent members of the community who appear to exert influence at numerous points in our sources.

It is quite possible that the end of the Envoyship was also associated with the eventual reduction in canonical tax collection which, even under Abū Ja‘far, appears to have been increasingly difficult, tending instead to local collection and distribution suggested by the rise of the oligarchic, and more localized elite. We see a further suggestion of this in Khaṣībī’s mentioning that Samurī’s knowledge was tested, and that he could not continue to gather money.⁴⁸

Following al-Samurī’s rescript in which the “second Occultation was announced,” this step was formally written into doctrine by Nu‘mānī in his theologized account of the Two Occultations, which placed the era of the mediation of the Envoys firmly in the past, and declared the Complete Occultation to be the era that would extend from the present period until the return of the Hidden Imam as Qā’im.⁴⁹ As Abdulsater notes, this declaration of the Second Occultation was a re-working of Abū Sahl’s earlier suggestion of a rupture between the old guard who issued rescripts, and a period in which contact with the Imam was maintained without rescripts.⁵⁰ Nu‘mānī’s doctrine of two Occultations, then was precedented, but this time it came to be canonized, the basis of all future articulations of the subject of the Occultation.

⁴⁸ Khaṣībī, *Hidaya*, 394-5.

⁴⁹ Nu‘mānī, *Ghayba*, 164; 178-9.

⁵⁰ Abdulsater, “Dynamics,” 327.

Conclusion

The institutional structures of the pre-Occultation community determined developments in the early Occultation period. By the time of the Eleventh Imam, the Imams were surrounded by a group of men who had developed systems of representation that supplied Imamic guidance to the community very much in lieu of direct Imamic command. For some, even the Imamate of the Tenth Imam was remembered as having been akin to an Occultation, due to his house arrest in Samarra and surveillance by the authorities. Thus, when the Eleventh Imam died, apparently without heir, the same group of men who represented the Imams of Samarra could step forward to hold the institutions of Imamate. Initially, they managed to maintain the status quo, perhaps by reproducing knowledge that had been built up by that point. The impetus for the establishment of a fully independent *wikāla*, which was to lay down the foundations of the Envoyship, came from the crisis at the heart of the family of the Imams. Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ was already suspect due to his feud with al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī of the Imamate. Although Ja‘far was, in some ways, the only viable candidate for the Imamate after al-Ḥasan, his reputation was further damaged by the way he handled the acrimonious dispute with ‘Askarī’s mother, Ḥudayth, over the physical property but also implicitly, the spiritual legacy of the Eleventh Imam (both of which were referred to as legacy, *waṣīyya*). Ḥudayth may have herself claimed the existence of a Child Imam, or of a pregnant concubine who would bear al-Ḥasan a child posthumously. However, it happened, such rumors did circulate, suggesting possibilities of an alternative to the despised Ja‘far. Initially many *wakīls*, and others in the community, may have backed Ja‘far as Imam. However, he was ultimately not able to salvage his reputation. Certainly a high-*wakīl* like Ḥājiz, though he appears to initially have accepted Ja‘far, soon turned against him. Once Ja‘far began to be rejected, alternative solutions to the crisis of succession had to be defined. Several of the solutions that

emerged in this period of factional splitting and perplexity drew upon the old Shi'ī idea of Occultation. It appears that the Occultation faction had been more or less aligned with the mother, rather than the brother, as is evident in the very different way they are treated in the narratives produced and preserved amongst the Occultation faction. Ḥājiz, who turned away from Ja'far, also appears as collecting money and issuing statements on behalf of an Imam. This looks like the first step in the crystallization of an Imamate without an Imam. Once the dispute was resolved, and Ja'far inherited and took control of the Imams' house in Samarra, and especially after Ḥudayth died, the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*, were left without a candidate for Imam, or a base for operations. The first difficulty had already been partially addressed. There was a belief that the mother of 'Askarī had asserted the existence of a child born to 'Askarī, and hidden after his birth. She is also associated with rumors about one of 'Askarī's concubines who was pregnant and would give birth to the Imam.

While the *wakīls* of the Eleventh Imam may initially have been united largely by the Imami doctrine that there must be an Imam somewhere on the earth to guarantee the salvation of the believers, the idea of a hidden Child Imam came to be a central rallying point for the Imami opposition to Ja'far 'the Liar,' opposed by the Ja'farites who had to accept the old Faḥīte doctrine of the permissibility of the transmission of the Imamate between two brothers. However, some *wakīls* were the close followers of 'Askarī, in particular 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd, had probably already burnt their bridges with Ja'far during the lifetime of 'Askarī,⁵¹ who had had a bitter rivalry with his brother. Instead, then, they fought to maintain the institutions of 'Askarī, in the name of the Hidden Child Imam. At some stage, the idea of a posthumous pregnancy was

⁵¹ Kashshī reports that al-'Amrī (presumably 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd) was involved in cursing Fāris b. Ḥātim, the supporter of Ja'far 'the Liar,' during the Imamate of Hādī. *Rijāl*, 373.

defeated, and a core of supporters rallied round the idea of a Child Imam, born to al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī *before* his death.

In the meantime, and perhaps in spite of the political and doctrinal difficulties that had to be sorted out, the *wakīls* continued to assert the necessity of paying canonical taxes to the Imamate. Payment of the canonical taxes was, indeed, a duty that held grave consequences for the believers, as well as guaranteeing their sense of identity and community in this world. In our sources, the rejection of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’ is intimately bound up with the refusal to cede the canonical taxes to him. But the *wakīls* continued to collect the canonical taxes in the name of the Imamate, albeit without a present Imam. The Imamate had become a set of institutions and structures surrounding an empty center: this donut-shaped institution of the Imamate was the *nāḥiya*. We know a few of the names of the high *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya*: Aḥmad b. Ishāq and Ḥājiz al-Washshā’ prime among them. ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd also appears in the sources as an important figure in attesting to the existence of the Child Imam, though he does not appear to have been active in collecting canonical taxes and issuing statements of the Hidden Imam during the Occultation era.

Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī speaks of all of the old guard of followers of the Eleventh Imam as having died out, all except one, by around 280/903. This surviving *wakīl* lived a little while longer as the only representative of the Imam, and before dying himself, though, we are told, he designated a hidden *wakīl* to succeed him. Abū Sahl’s account does not clearly fit the details we can glean from the narrative reports that survive. It seems that the hidden *wakīl* may either have been Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī, or a *wakīl* who he was secretly in touch with. The identity of the one *wakīl* who survived the others is also obscure. Twelver Orthodoxy would lead one to suggest that it should be ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, but there are no reports surviving which mention ‘Uthmān b.

Saʿīd as issuing statements or collecting money during the Occultation period. This leaves us with Aḥmad b. Ishāq, a Qummī, and Ḥājiz al-Washshāʿ, a Baghdadi, both of whom appear prominently in early Occultation reports about the *nāḥiya*. The reason for the murkiness during this period is that the affairs of the community were still in flux. The leadership of the community was contested between *wakīls*, both within the Occultation faction and beyond, and by non-*wakīls* who had different visions for the community. The archetypes of the appointed *wakīl* with sacral-fiscal responsibilities and the self-declared *bāb* with direct spiritual knowledge were contested throughout this period, and up until the demise of the wakīlate. The reason that no clear picture can be formed of this period is that the people involved did not themselves know quite how to act or what to think. It was, as the sources tell us, a period of perplexity (*ḥayra*). By the time the idea of the Envoy became firmly established under Abū Jaʿfar, a real momentum had been generated around the idea of the Hidden Imam. Clearly, given the flux in institution and doctrine, the authority of the early *nāḥiya* had not been firmly established before Abū Jaʿfar, giving rise to a further crisis of authority in the community by the time of their deaths around 280/893.

This crisis of authority was eventually overcome, some time after 290/903, when Abū Jaʿfar resumed the issuing of rescripts in the name of the Imam. As Ḥājiz had done before him, these rescripts underscored the authority of the *nāḥiya*, but they also regulated the nature of the sacred economy of canonical tax collection in the Occultation period. When Abū Jaʿfar's died in 304/916 or 305/917, the institution of the Envoyship was sufficiently established to generate a succession process which emulated the succession of Imams. The past decades of confusion then had to be written into a form that made sense. This ultimately involved depicting a quasi-Imamic process of succession to the Envoyship through a legacy (*waṣīyya*) from the Eleventh Imam to

‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd, the great *wakīl* of the pre-Occultation era, and then from ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘īd to his son. This process of succession through designation was then repeated at the death of Abū Ja‘far when Ibn Rawḥ succeeded to his position. Ibn Rawḥ was a Nawbakhtī with links to both Qumm and Baghdad – the central elements of an early alliance in support of the *nāḥiya* formed around the Baghdadi Ḥājiz and the Qummī Aḥmad b. Ishāq. Under Ibn Rawḥ, the Envoyship came out of the shadows, and he had significant interactions with court figures, including influential Shi‘i bureaucrats and governors. After Ibn Rawḥ, however, though he appointed a successor, the Envoyship fell into abeyance. Part of the reason for the ending of the Envoyship was the growing authority of the scholars up to that point, whose test of traditional doctrinal and legal knowledge had been an important element of the rejection of Ja‘far ‘the Liar’. Another major reason was the shock to the institution of the Envoyship created by an internal threat: Shalmaghānī, a member of Ibn Rawḥ’s own establishment, a scholar who emerged to claim to participate in the divine essence in the gnostic ‘*ghulāt*’ tradition. The emergence of this kind of *bābī* claim had always been a potential result of the elevation of the institution of the *wakīl* or Envoy, with its close genetic relationship to the archetype of the gnostic *bāb*. This close relationship can be seen in the blurred lines and contestations between the *wakīls*, Envoys and *bābs* in less orthodox hadith compilations of twelvers like Khaṣībī and Ibn Rustum al-Ṭabarī. Even though Shalmaghānī’s claim was defeated, the threat to the Twelvers had been proven, and the oligarchic elite of Shi‘a notables who had given their imprimatur to the succession of Abū Ja‘far and Ibn Rawḥ, reached a consensus that no more Envoys would follow Ibn Rawḥ’s successor as Envoy, al-Samurī. Later works grant al-Samurī miraculous foresight, as the Hidden Imam sent him a last *tawqī‘* rescript, predicting al-Samurī’s imminent death, and the permanent cessation of the Envoyship.

The eighty-year tenure of the *wakīls* and Envoys was a transitional era between the leadership of the Imams, and the authority of the scholars. During this period a transition was made between a centralizing Imamate, where community finances, legal dogma and doctrine were regulated centrally, whether by the Imam, or by his close associates, and a more diffuse conception of authority in which the same kinds of elite figures and scholars in the Shi‘i community continued to hold authority, but on a more localized model, legitimized through recourse to increasingly publically circulated texts, rather than through claims to contact with a single, divinely-guided man.

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