THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO


A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

BY

EDMUND HAYES

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
AUGUST 2015
Abū ʿAbd 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.

– Kulaynī, Kāfī
# Table of Contents

List of tables .......................................................................................................................... x
List of figures ............................................................................................................................ xi
Abstract ................................................................................................................................. xii
Abbreviations .......................................................................................................................... xiv
Note on transliteration .............................................................................................................. xv
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... xvi

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

1.1 Overview .............................................................................................................................. 1
1.2 Literature review .................................................................................................................. 10
1.3 What is the Occultation? ....................................................................................................... 16
  1.3.1 Occultation ideas in Islam .............................................................................................. 20
  1.3.2 The ‘gnostic’ contribution towards the Occultation ......................................................... 25
  1.4 From wakīlṣ to Envoys (safīrṣ) .......................................................................................... 27
1.5 Periodization ......................................................................................................................... 32
1.6 Sources and methods ........................................................................................................... 35
  1.6.1 A chronology of sources ............................................................................................... 35
  1.6.2 Methods of approaching sources .................................................................................. 42
1.7 Sociological framework ........................................................................................................ 48
  1.7.1 Symbolic and effective authority .................................................................................... 50
  1.7.2 Charisma and representation ......................................................................................... 55

Chapter 2: The wikāla and the Imami legal theory of canonical taxation .............................. 67

2.1 Overview .............................................................................................................................. 67
2.2 The Qur’ānic origins of Islamic canonical taxation................................................................. 71
2.3 Tax theory in the context of resistance to the Umayyad Caliphs ........................................ 75
2.4 Key terms of the legal theory of canonical Islamic taxation ............................................... 77
2.5 The beginnings of Imami taxation law .................................................................................. 82
2.6 Shi‘i tax theory before Bāqir and Ṣādiq .............................................................................. 85
2.7 Bāqir and Ṣādiq on zakāt ...................................................................................................... 86
   2.7.1 Zakāt/ṣadaqa: distribute it yourself ............................................................................... 88
   2.7.2 Zakāt/ṣadaqa: pay it to the Imam .................................................................................. 93
   2.7.3 Dispensations ............................................................................................................... 95
   2.7.4 Creative accounting: experimenting with the canonization of new revenue categories..... 99
2.8 The origination and development of the Imami khums ......................................................... 105
   2.8.1 Bāqir’s traditions on khums ....................................................................................... 109
   2.8.2 Ṣādiq’s traditions on khums ....................................................................................... 112
   2.8.3 Khums theory under Kāẓim ....................................................................................... 119
   2.8.4 Riḍā: crisis of succession and resistance from his followers ........................................ 125
   2.8.5 Later Imams ................................................................................................................ 129
2.9 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................. 130

Chapter 3: The crucible of Occultation: the structure and dynamics of the Imami community .... 132
3.1 Overview .............................................................................................................................. 132
3.2 The structure of the Imami community around the time of the Occultation ....................... 133
   3.2.1 The geographical disposition of the community connected by the wikāla-network .... 133
   3.2 The geographical location of the wikāla-network’s leadership ......................................... 143
3.3 The Institutions of the Imamate ........................................................................................... 147
   3.3.1 The Imam ................................................................................................................... 147
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Al-gharīm</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3 The nāhiya</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.4 Wakīls and Envoys (safīrs)</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5 Activities of the regional wakīls</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.7 Lower functionaries</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.8 The household of the Imam</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.9 Social hierarchies</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.10 Networks and hierarchy</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 The functions of the financial network</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 The sacral nature of the financial network</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 Gathering of funds</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3 Receipts, notes, letters and rescripts</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.4 Secret signs</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.5 Stamping coins and ingots</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.6 Redistribution of money and blessings</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.7 Mechanisms of community defense, coherence and coercion</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.8 Central versus local leadership</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.9 Mechanisms of community defense, coherence and coercion</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4. Crisis in the Imams’ household: the phantom pregnancy, and Ja’far ‘the Liar’</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1. Overview</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2. The Imam who might have been: Ja’far ‘the Liar’</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3. Key manoeuvres after the death of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1. The first twenty-four hours: washing and praying over the corpse</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2. The first twenty-four hours: securing the chattels and seizing the house</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.3. The inheritance dispute and the phantom pregnancy: the factors behind the original claim for the birth of a Child Imam ................................................................. 214

4.4. Spokespersons for the Child Imam as an alternative to Jaʿfar .................................................. 224

4.4.1. Ḥudayth, mother of al-ʿAskarī: the first intermediary of the Imam? .................................. 224

4.4.2. Al-Ḥasan’s aunt, and Ḥudayth’s ally: Ḥakīma/Khadīja ...................................................... 233

4.4.3. The concubine and the phantom pregnancy ......................................................................... 235

4.4.4. The concubine-eunuch alliance and their roles as intermediaries to the Child Imam ....... 239

4.4.5. Overview of the early opposition to Jaʿfar ......................................................................... 243

4.5. Doctrines of non-alignment, and the wider search for an Imam ........................................... 248

4.6. Jaʿfar’s troubles ...................................................................................................................... 251

4.6.1. The difficulty of creating a viable network ..................................................................... 251

4.6.2. Jaʿfar, the test of knowledge, and the Qummi alliance .................................................. 262

Chapter 5: The wakīls of the nāḥiya during the Era of Perplexity .............................................. 267

5.1 Overview ................................................................................................................................ 267

5.2 Forerunners of the Envoy before the Occultation era ........................................................... 270

5.3 Hadith, theology and institutions ............................................................................................ 270

5.4 Theological developments relating to the early nāḥiya .......................................................... 272

5.4.1 Who and where is the Imam? ............................................................................................. 277

5.5 Abū Sahl’s Kitāb al-tanbīh: the decisive touchstone for dating the early nāḥiya .................. 281

5.6 The contribution of the Qummi scholars .............................................................................. 287

5.7 Aḥmad b. Ishāq and the Qummi delegation ......................................................................... 291

5.8 Aḥmad b. Ishāq as bāb to the Child Imam ............................................................................. 300

5.9 To tax or not to tax? ............................................................................................................. 306

5.10 The coercion of the Ṭalibids ............................................................................................... 312

5.11 The shift from Samarra to Baghdad and the politics of the caliphal court ......................... 315
5.12 Ḥājiz as Envoy ........................................................................................................ 319
5.13 Al-Asadī as Ḥājiz’s successor .................................................................................. 332
5.14 Al-Asadī as part of the Occultation faction .............................................................. 335
5.15 Where are the Kufans? ............................................................................................ 336
5.16 Ibn Mahziyār of Ahwāz, the doubting wakīl ............................................................ 339
5.17 How was a hidden imam possible? .............................................................................. 351
5.18 Summing up the early wakīlate of the Era of Perplexity ............................................. 357

Chapter 6: ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī: Envoy or wakīl? .................................................. 361

6.1 Overview ....................................................................................................................... 361
6.2 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was not an Envoy during the Occultation ....................................... 365
6.3 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was a wakīl during the lifetime of the Eleventh Imam......................... 366
6.4 The death of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as a means of anointing Abū Jaʿfar .................................... 369
6.5 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was barely active during the Occultation ........................................ 371
6.6 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as eyewitness and ‘the reliable’ ......................................................... 376
6.6.1 Significance of the epithet “al-thiqa al-māʾmūn” ...................................................... 385
6.6.2 The question of handwriting .................................................................................... 386
6.7 The testimony of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī ...................................................................... 388
6.8 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as bāb to the Eleventh Imam, and Nuṣayrī anxiety about his role .......... 394
6.9 Summing up the role of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd ................................................................ 402

Chapter 7: Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī the Envoy ........................................................................ 405

7.1 Overview ....................................................................................................................... 405
7.2 Sources for Abū Jaʿfar’s Life ...................................................................................... 406
7.3 Was Abū Jaʿfar a scholar? ......................................................................................... 413
7.4 The interregnum in the wakīlate and opposition to Abū Jaʿfar ........................................ 416
7.5 Ibn Mahziyār and Abū Jaʿfar’s succession to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd ......................................................... 418
7.6 Rival bābs ........................................................................................................................................ 420
7.7 The younger generation: support for Abū Jaʿfar ........................................................................... 421
7.8 Opposition to Abū Jaʿfar .................................................................................................................. 422
  7.8.1 Ahmad b. Hilāl al-Karkhī ............................................................................................................. 423
  7.8.2 Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl (al-Bilālī) and “the split” in the Occultation faction ................................. 426
7.9 The rise of Abū Jaʿfar ......................................................................................................................... 435
  7.9.1 The hidden bāb of the Hidden Imam ......................................................................................... 435
  7.9.2 Al-Asadī as a supporter of Abū Jaʿfar ......................................................................................... 448
  7.9.3 Summing up Abū Jaʿfar’s transition to authority ................................................................. 449
7.10 The Contribution of Abū Jaʿfar ....................................................................................................... 450
  7.10.1 The Rescripts (tawqīʿāt) .............................................................................................................. 453
  7.10.2 A key rescript ............................................................................................................................. 456
  7.10.3 Fiscal issues in the rescripts ....................................................................................................... 461
  7.10.4 The waqf rescript ...................................................................................................................... 465
  7.10.5 Issues of doctrine and theology and belief in the rescripts .................................................. 470
7.11 Abū Jaʿfar and the mechanisms of authority .................................................................................. 474
  7.11.1 A secret letter ............................................................................................................................. 474
  7.11.2 Al-Asadī’s inspired additions to Abū Jaʿfar’s rescript ............................................................. 476
  7.11.3 Summary of the contribution of the rescripts ........................................................................ 477
  7.11.4 Abū Jaʿfar and “don’t ask don’t tell” ...................................................................................... 478
7.12 Death of Abū Jaʿfar ....................................................................................................................... 483
7.13 Summary of Abū Jaʿfar’s career ..................................................................................................... 485

Chapter 8: Ibn Rawḥ and the attempt to institutionalize the Envoyship ............................................ 488
8.1 Overview .............................................................................................................................. 488

8.2 Ibn Rawḥ and the succession to Abū Jaʿfar ..................................................................... 489

8.3 The canonization of the 'Amrī legacy .............................................................................. 491

8.4 The Career of Ibn Rawḥ ................................................................................................. 493

8.5 Ibn Rawḥ and Government ............................................................................................ 493

8.6 Ibn Rawḥ and Shalmaghānī ............................................................................................ 495

8.6.1 Ibn Rawḥ had trouble proving his scholarly credentials versus Shalmaghānī .......... 499

8.6.2 Shalmaghānī cursed and executed ............................................................................ 500

8.7 Death of Ibn Rawḥ and the failure of the Envoyship ..................................................... 500

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 508

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................ 514
List of tables

Table 1: A new periodization for the Occultation-era Imami community........................................ 34
Table 2: Canonical taxation categories classed according to tax type and land type .................. 81
Table 3: Wakīls who saw the Imam, according to Muhammad al-Kūfī ............................................ 134
Table 4: Non-wakīls who saw the Imam............................................................................................ 137
Table 5: Geographical locations mentioned in the Ibn Bābūya’s Kamāl, covering the early Occultation period.................................................................................................................. 140
Table 6: Contributions to the nāhiya during the early Occultation period, from Ibn Bābūya’s Kamāl.................................................................................................................................................. 167
Table 7: The major actors in the earliest phase of the Occultation................................................. 191
List of figures

Figure 1: Hierarchy of the *wikāla*-network before the Occultation .............................................. 162
Figure 2: Claims to the spiritual legacy of the Imam ................................................................. 245
Figure 3: The doctrinal milieu of the early Occultation-faction .................................................. 280
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.
safīr), Abū Ja‘far al-ʿAmrī (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 Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī laid claim to his legacy as the Envoy after him. Ibn Rawḥ’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 Rawḥ’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): taʿālā, meaning “He is most high” used for God

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

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

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

(SA) Ṣalawāt allāh ʿalayhi, 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 ʿanhu, 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


Elr: Encyclopedia Iranica

EQ: Encyclopedia of the Qurʿān

IJMES: International Journal of Middle East Studies


JNES: Journal of Near Eastern Studies

JRAS: Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.
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 ʿAskarī and Imam ʿAskarī, but also al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, and Mufīd, but also al-Shaykh al-Mufīd

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

ʿAbbasid, not ʿAbbāsid
Dinar and dirham
Hadith
Imam (not Imām)
Ismaili
Shiʿa
Shiʿi
Sunni

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

Baghdad
Kufa
Samarra (not Sāmarrāʾ, or Surra man raʾā)
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.)
Acknowledgements

There are many people who have helped me develop the ideas that have gone into this dissertation. In first place, my committee Franklin Lewis, Paul Walker, Tahera Qutbuddin and Sabine Schmidtke have all been very generous with their time and extremely supportive as I plotted the erratic path which somehow lead me to where I am. Many times have I had the occasion to compare notes with other graduate students and thank my stars for such a committee. My heartfelt thanks go to them. Neither must I forget my first adviser at the University, Wadad Qadi, whose retirement was a loss to those of us who prized her instruction, but who has been, and I hope will continue to be, a salutary resource for me. I have benefitted greatly from the wider community of scholars at the University of Chicago especially Alireza Doostdar, Orit Bashkin, Ahmed El-Shamsy, Fred Donner, Farouk Mustafa, Bruce Lincoln and Daisy Delegou, who have all provided valuable advice. Among my most careful and conscientious readers and interlocutors have been fellow graduate students, especially the members of the dissertation writing group, Chris Markiewicz, Austin O-Malley, Sabahat Adi, Alidost Numan, Kaveh Hemmat, as well as Rodrigo Adem, Cam Cross, the participants of the Hodgson society: Ferenc Csirkés, Shiraz Hajiani, Derek Davison, James Windsor, Zahit Atcil, Nazeer Lotfi-Fard, the group of Franke institute affiliated fellows, and the members of the wonderful Chicago workshops – MEHAT, Medieval Studies and Islamic Studies, at which I presented parts of my work. The other participants and coordinators of the Shiʿi Studies Group have provided a great context for thinking around the field of Shiʿi Studies, in particular Mohammad Sagha, Zach Winters, Anya Hosain and Alexander Muller, as also have many scholars working on Shiʿism beyond the University of Chicago, especially Robert Gleave, Sean Anthony, Hassan Ansari and Sajjad Rizvi, and all of those who have participated in our Shiʿi studies symposia.
I must take the opportunity to fulfil the tradition – conventional yet far from empty – of thanking my parents, for creating around me a lively, loving environment that fostered my curiosity about language, literature, history and religion, and for helping to deliver the dissertation with a final week of babysitting. And finally thank you to Flora, Jacob, Rufus and Leila for making a home for me to return to – wherever we may ramble.
Chapter 1: Introduction: The question, the field, sources and methodology

1.1 Overview

In the year 260 H/874 CE, the Imami Shi’i community was struck by crisis. Their Eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-ʿAskarī, 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 (nāʾib) or the Four Envoys (safīr). 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. ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd (or Ḥafṣ b. ʿAmr according to Kashshī) al-ʿAmrī (d. before 280/893)³

2. His son, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī (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 Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq’s who acknowledged the Imamate of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī 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 (ʿaskar) due to his prolonged enforced stay in Samarra.

³ See discussion of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s death date and the chronology of the early Occultation era in Chapter 6.
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 wukalāʾ, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and Muḥammad ibn ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī 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 Samarri, which Halm notes is “presumably a folk etymology called forth by the reminiscence of Sāmarrā.” Instead, based upon his perusal of Samʿānī’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 Wāṣiṭ and Baṣra.” Halm, Shiʿism, 37 and 143, n16. In his Divine Guide, Amir-Moezzi uses both Sumirī (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.


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 distinguished 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 Ḥudayth, 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. 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-Kāẓim 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 wāqifīa, 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, 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 Jaʿfar’s Envoyship was back-projected by the third envoy and his cronies, we must emphasize that Abū Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar. Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar. Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar achievements, 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 Jaʿfar’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 Shiʿa 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 Jaʿfar 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 *nāṣṣ* designation of Envoys, which closely followed the mechanism designed to guarantee the succession of Imams. However, after Abū Jaʿfar’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 Shiʿism.

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 Shiʿi 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 Shiʿa 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, Nuʿmānī’s Ghayba, which declared the period of mediation between the Hidden Imam and the community (which Nuʿmānī called the ‘Short Occultation’) to be finished, having been succeeded by the ‘Complete Occultation.’9

1.2 Literature review

In the field of early Shiʿism, 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, Shiʿism (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 42.
time of the Occultation, and the sociological and political context of the formation of the Occultation doctrine. The first monograph 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. 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‘i community. 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* presented a long *durée* interrogation of the development of authority in Shi‘i 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 Bṛitrāge zur Mahdīlehre des Islams* (Heidelberg: C. Winter 1901).
Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, but provides an important theoretical contribution to the field in its highlighting the esoteric tradition of Imami Shiʿism, 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*, 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 Modarressi’s work, while giving more sustained attention to the early period in which the Twelver Occultation doctrine was developed. 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 Ghaemmaghami’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. 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

---


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 if 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 Shiʿi 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-ṣughrā 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

---

²⁰ These two volumes appear together as parts one and two of Mawsūʿat al-ʿImām al-Mahdi (Qumm: Muʿassasat Iḥyāʾ 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. 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‘i 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 Imamī community, including Shona Wardrop’s dissertation on the period of the Ninth and Tenth Imams, and Mehmet Ali Buyukkara’s dissertation on the period of the Seventh and Eighth Imams, which also led to two articles regarding Seventh and Eighth Imams al-Kāẓim and al-Riḍā providing important political context for events within the Shi‘i community, and the development of the network of fiscal agents of the Imams. Again, Modarressi’s Crisis and Consolidation must be picked out as a key work in the development of scholarship on the wakīls,

---

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. 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).

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.

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.


27 Klemm, “Sufarā.” Verena Klemm is also responsible for an encyclopedia article which summarises work on the deputies of the Imam in the early ghaibā 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 Shiʿism. This debate largely derives from the largely intellectual-historical framework inhabited by most scholars of early Shiʿism, though it is important for my topic as this relationship has important political-sociological ramifications. Marshall Hodgson, in his article “How Did the Early Shiʿa become Sectarian?” 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 Shiʿism, 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. Scholars like Heinz Halm Mushegh Asatryan and Bella Tendler have provided an increasingly sharply focused picture of the distinctive vision of Islam of the community of Kufan Shiʿa 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

29 Modarressi, Crises, 48-51.
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 prophets\(^{34}\)
- 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 (\textit{wakīls}) Envoys (\textit{safīrs}), Gateways (\textit{bābs}) or Deputies (\textit{nāʾibs}) 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 \textit{hujjat allāh}, or Proof of God, see Maria Dakake, “\textit{Hujjat,}” \textit{EIr.}
earlier narratives were no doubt formative in the influence they exerted on the Twelver Occultation as it was articulated. Some of these parallels were used explicitly as precedents that would justify the Occultation of the Imam. Thus Nuʿmānī (d.360/970-71) relies upon a number of hadiths that states that the Qāʾim 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; and rising with the sword like Muḥammad. Ibn Bābūya built upon these prophetic parallels in his far larger work, Kamāl al-dīn wa tamām al-niʿma, 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, Idrīs’s hiding in a cave, being fed by an angel, Abraham’s being hidden in a cave as a baby, and miraculously suckling from his own thumb, 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 Kynge 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 wynne 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-Kāẓim clearly show a wāqifite origin.

37 Nuʿmānī, Ghayba, 329.
41 Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 138-9.
Alexander’s journeys to the edges of the earth, and Khiḍr’s supernatural disappearances and appearances. 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. 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. 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). A generation later, after the death of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (d. 61/680), al-Mukhtār al-Thaqafī (d. 67/687) 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. 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 ‘Abbāsid 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’iya and Early Shi’i ism between Myth and History” (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2009), 193-6.
48 Sean Anthony, “Kaysāniyya,” EIr.
identified with the “appearance” (Ar. ẓuhūr) 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” (qāʾim), 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 Shiʿism 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 ʿAbbasid dynasty. The installation of the ʿAbbasids 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 ʿAbbasid 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-Ḥanafiyya 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 Qāʾim and Mahdī.

Following the death of Ṣādiq 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 \textit{Nāwūsiyya} believed that Ṣādiq had not died, but went into Occultation.\footnote{Al-Hasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhti, \textit{Firaq al-shī’a}, edited by Helmut Ritter, (İstanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-Dawla, 1931), 57.} Others who had followed the elder son, Ismāʿīl who had, however, predeceased his father, transferred their allegiance to Ismāʿīl’s son, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, and the Qarāmiṭa claimed that he had survived and continued to await his reappearance well into the fifth/eleventh century even after the Fatimid Mahdī had risen with the claim that he was the descendent of a series of Imams, the descendants of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, who had hitherto been operating in hiding.\footnote{Farhad Daftary, \textit{Isma'ilis in Medieval Muslim Societies} (London; New York: I.B. Tauris 2005), 45-68.}

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 Jaʿfar. Following the death of Kāẓim, although many transferred their allegiance to his son ʿAlī 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 \textit{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.\footnote{Arjomand, “Imam \textit{Absconditus},” 1.} While later Imamis dismissed this group with
accusations that the *wāqifī wakīl* only rejected the 8th Imam, Riḍā, in order to withhold the canonical taxes they had collected under Kāẓim.\(^{54}\) 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 *wāqifī* cause.\(^{56}\) Among the many ideas that entered the Twelver Occultation doctrine by way of *wāqifī* reports was the idea that the eschatological final Imam, the Qāʾim, 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 ʿAskarī, replicated the ‘Occultation’ of Kāẓim – 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.
\(^{56}\) For the *wāqifī* books on the Occultation, see Klemm “*Sufarā‘*,” 135-6; and Hussain, *Occultation*, 2-9.
\(^{57}\) Arjomand, “Imam *Absconditus*,” 1.
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 (hulūl), 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 bāhs. 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

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” (dāʾī), 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 is idea is well represented in Ismaili thought, 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. This cyclical

---

60 See, for example, Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London; Boston: Kegan Paul, 1983), 186-7.
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-gnostics 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 Kāzim 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 Jaʿfar ‘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-ghayba65 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,” EIr.
64 See Chapter 4.
66 See Chapter 8.
of the Occultation were characterized by an institution of mediation between the community and the Imam. This was the Envoys or Safirate (Ar. sifāra). A series of four intermediaries or deputies known as the Envoys or ‘Safirs’ 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-Twelver, 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 (ṣafīr), and later Twelver usage of the word deputy (nāʾib), 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 (wasāʾīt). 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 (ṣafīr).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 (anbiyāʾ wa rusul) are referred to as God’s envos (ṣafarāʾ).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-Nuʿmānī 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī 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 keys 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 Shiʿism. Another term sometimes used synonymously with Envoy is that of bāb – a
word pregnant with significance from a comparative Shiʿi 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-
Ḥanafiyya (Sean Anthony, “Kaysāniyya,” Elr, or Abū al-Khaṭṭāb and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi,
“Katṭābiyya,” Elr) 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. 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. 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 dāʾī al-duʿāt, as ranks in the Fatimid Ismaili hierarchy, in which she argues that while dāʾī al-duʿāt 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-Muʿayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid daʿwa 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 Nuṣayris. I also use such phrases as ‘pro-ʿAmrī’ to distinguish between doctrinal position and political affiliation.

1.5 Periodization

Unless speaking about the post-Nuʿmānī 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, 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. 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 Nuʿmānī’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 Nuʿmānī’s interpretation of the two Occultations in his Ghayba written in 342/953. Even so, we cannot be sure that Nuʿmānī’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 Nuʿmānī’s conception might have been equally unstable when first proposed. Nonetheless, the date of composition of Nuʿmānī’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 Nuʿmānī’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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Occultation</th>
<th>Until 260/874: Era of the manifest Imams acting as ultimate legal and doctrinal authorities and actively directing the <em>wikāla</em>-network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Occultation</td>
<td>260-c280/874-c893: The period of the early <em>nāḥiya</em>, when authority was in the hands of the surviving old guard <em>wakīls</em> 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 (<em>hayra</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c280-c290: The rupture or <em>interregnum</em> between the surviving old guard of <em>wakīls</em> and the new generation of Envoys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>290-329/ 903-941: The period of the Envoys. They attempted to reestablish and consolidate the centralized <em>wikāla</em>-network, by establishing quasi-Imamic authority in their own hands, but ultimately failed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>329-342/ 941-953: The canonical Envoys lapse, but a period of contestation continues in which pretenders continue to make claims to be Envoys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical era</td>
<td>338-460/950-1067: Nuʿmānī 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...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
orthodoxy based around hadith transmitters and jurists, rather than political actors at the head of the wikāla-network

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 Envoys are 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’ā*, written in 286/899.80

2. Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī’s *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-nī’ma*.

3. Sa’d b. ʿAbd 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-kāfī*,85 completed before his death in 328 or 329/939-40 or 940-41.86

5. Al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī’s *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

---

81 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.
85 For the vocalization of this name, see Yaron Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs: an Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 17, n47.
87 For the dating of his death, see Yaron Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 33.
7. Abū 'Amr Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Kashshī’s *Ma’rifat al-rijāl*, or simply *Rijāl*, extant in the redaction of Ṭūsī, known as *Ikhtisār ma’rifat al-rijāl*, written before his death in the mid-fourth/tenth century, though largely reflecting an understanding of the Shi‘i community before the canonization of the Envoy.

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, 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, 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. 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 yaḥduruhu al-faqīḥ*.

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

---

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.
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 theologicalization 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-Khaṣībī,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 Nuṣayri-ʿAlawī 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 tāqiyya.”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-ʿAlawīs: an introduction to the religion, history, and identity of the leading minority in Syria_ (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 17, n47.
98 By the time of Majliš’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 Shi’a turn,” though he admits that some saw it as unreliable. Friedman, _Nuṣayrī ʿAlawīs_, 26.
99 Friedman, _Nuṣayrī ʿAlawīs_, 34.
100 Halm, “Ḡolāt,” _ELR_.

38
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 Nuşayrī strands of the community must be acknowledged from the outset, and, despite the official ostracism of Ibn Nuşayr, we must see the Nuşayrīs 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 Jaʿfar. It gives far less attention to Abū Jaʿfar than to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 Nuşayr as being the Eleventh Imam’s bāb. Abū Jaʿfar is merely mentioned as part of the pantheon of Envoys, 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, 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī’s activities as Envoy are depicted. Neither Kulaynī nor Nuʿmanī 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 Nuşayrī 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 Nuşayrī perspective is reports which oppose the inflation of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’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.
103 Friedman, *Nuşayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 33.
However, the apparently early dating of the *Hidayah* is complicated by the fact that different sections of the work may well have been compiled at different stages, including, quite possibly, after Khaṣibī’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 *Hidayah*’s section on the lives of the Imams. This part of the *Hidayah* is the only among our sources to include testimony from the brother of Abū Ja’far, who was named Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Ṭumān al-‘Amrī. The chains of transmission indicate that Khaṣibī had directly communicated with him. Though we might expect the testimony of Aḥmad b. Ṭumān 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 *nāhiya*. Instead, in one, Abū Ja’far is a mere eyewitness to the miraculous activities of the *nāhiya*. 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 *nāhiya*, 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 *Hidayah*, 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. Khaṣibī, *Hidayah*, 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 Dalāʾil al-imāma. Though the Dalāʾil 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 Dalāʾil 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 Ţūsī 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 Shiʿism.

The basic unit we have to deal with in doing this work is the hadith report (often called the *khabar* (pl. *akhbār*) in the Shiʿi 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 Shiʿi context, hadith of the Prophet stand alongside statements and narratives of the Imams, as being of equal religious value. The scientific study of Shiʿi hadith has barely been broached.\(^\text{105}\) While much ink has been spilled

\(^{105}\) Newman gives an assessment of the state of the study of Shiʿi 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 Shiʿi 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*. 

43
regarding Prophetic hadith in the Sunni canon, and the question of authenticity in general as well as historical hadith in the historical chronicles, the dynamics of the compilation and use of hadith in Shiʿi scholarship will require generations of careful studies to allow us to more fully understand Shiʿi hadith. What is certain is that the treatment of Shiʿi 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 Shiʿi 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. The extent to which basic narratives could be altered once established was, in this case, limited by living memory and by the


conservative methodology of the (largely Qummi) 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 hadith\textsuperscript{109} 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.\textsuperscript{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

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

\textsuperscript{110} Ibn Bābūya, for example, preferred to quote from earlier theologians, such as Ibn Qība 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 Imamis 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-ʿAskarī 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 Jaʿfar 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.\textsuperscript{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.

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 Shiʿi 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 Shiʿi 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.
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 (*tawqīʿāt*). 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,\textsuperscript{115} relying to a large extent upon kinship, patronage and direct relationship.
Nonetheless, the institution of the \textit{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 Shiʿi 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 Shiʿism. What was the relation between the Imams and their
followers? How was it possible that the Shiʿi 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?

\textsuperscript{115} For a sociological definition of ‘institutions’ see, for example Shmuel Eisenstadt, “Social Institutions,” in
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.\footnote{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 as least since Ferdinand de Saussure. \textit{Course in General Linguistics}, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 67-70.}

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-Ṣādiq 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.\footnote{See, for example Wilferd Madelung, \textit{Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam}, (London: Variorum Reprints 1985).} However, if we understand the community as bound by recognition of the \textit{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
and cursing, though it is true that the Tenth Imam also resorted to assassination. 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, 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…” 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 Shiʿi 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 if Imamis, but instead suggesting they

---

118 Kashshī, Rījāl, 371-4.
120 Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 254-5.
were distorting the teachings of the Imam.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{125} and that they would not be purified without an Imam to collect their canonical taxes,\textsuperscript{126} or that they would not achieve salvation without explicitly acknowledging a named Imam.\textsuperscript{127} While they appear to have been concerned

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} See, Modarressi, \textit{Crisis}, Chapter 2.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Amir-Moezzi, \textit{Divine Guide}.
\item \textsuperscript{123} This appears to be the case with the support of the renegade \textit{wakil} Fāris b. Ḥātim and his followers for Abū Ja‘far Muhammad, the son of Hādī, who later transferred their allegiance to Ja‘far ‘the Liar’. See discussion in Chapter 4.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Thus for example, the \textit{wagifī} renegades at the time of the death of Kāẓim included both rationalistic and ‘\textit{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 \textit{wakīls} were supported both by Nuṣayrī gnostics and anti-gnostics: see Chapters 7-8.
\item \textsuperscript{125} See a statement of this creed in Kulayni Kafi, 329-330.
\item \textsuperscript{126} See Chapter 2.
\item \textsuperscript{127} See, for example Zurāra’s deathbed dilemma before it was clear who should succeed Śādiq. Takim, \textit{Heirs}, 112.
\end{itemize}
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 *badāʾ*, which holds that God can change his rulings in response to fresh circumstances,129 was applied after the disconcerting moment in which, Ismāʿîl, the designated successor of Jaʿfar al-Ṣâdiq, 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 Jaʿfar Muḥammad predeceased his father ʿAlî al-Hâdî, the Tenth Imam. Equally, the faṭḥite doctrine that the Imamate can be passed between brothers as well as between father and son, established to allow Ismāʿīl to pass the Imamate on to ʿAbd Allâh al-Aftâḥ, 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, “*Badāʾ*,” *EI2*. 
to identify themselves as faṭḥites towards the Imamate of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar,’ upon the death of the Eleventh Imam in 260/874.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{130} See Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{131} For a succinct summary of these splits, based on the heresiographies, see Moojan Momen, \textit{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 Shiʿi 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. In the study of early Shiʿism 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 Shiʿi 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. 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 Shiʿi conception of walāya and Weber’s conception of the contractual relationship between the charismatic individual and the charismatic community. Arjomand also looks at Shiʿi history through a Weberian lens, though his interests lie less with providing a deeper understanding of the effects of charismatic authority in early Shiʿi history, than with articulating a version of Weber’s teleological conception of progressive rationalization. As I hope to show, the application of Weberian categories to the context of Shiʿism continues to be a fruitful exercise in

---

133 Maria Massi Dakake, The Charismatic Community: Shiʿite 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 say\(^ {137}\) 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.


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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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,

\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.

\textbf{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

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 Shiʿi complaint rose were based upon divergent religio-political approaches to the question of post-prophetic authority. The early models of Shiʿi leadership were characterized by a high degree of charisma, as in the case of ʿAlī, Husayn, and other figures of exceptional spiritual appeal who rose with the sword against worldly authorities. However, in Imami Shiʿism, characterized by the naṣṣ designation of succession, charisma is restricted to more routinized forms. Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, identified by Twelvers as the fifth and sixth Imams respectively, were probably the founders of Imami Shiʿism, 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

the Umayyads faltered in the face of the growing pious opposition towards them. To what extent were Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq invested with charisma? What did their authority consist of? The authority of Bāqir and Ṣādiq 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.” 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.
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 Sādiq 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 Kāẓim 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-Kāzim, 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

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 ʿAlī al-Riḍā was designated heir apparent by Caliph al-Maʾmūn. And when the first child Imam, the Ninth Imam, al-Jawād, succeeded to the Imamate at the age of seven,\(^\text{145}\) it precipitated a different kind of crisis. Of course, a child can certainly be considered charismatic, as the example of the first Safavid king, Ismāʿīl 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 Qurʾān, 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 Ṣādiq. 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 nāṣṣ 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 Qurʾān, 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 Qurʾān 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 *nāhiya* 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 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 ‘Abbāsid 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. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq did claim the right to collect *zakāt*, which appears to represent something of a

---

² Though around the time of Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Shiʿi or not, reacted against. Ultimately, however, the Imami Shiʿi followers of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq stopped short of revolutionary action (at least until the rise of the Ismaili Shiʿi daʿwa 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 Shiʿa 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/sadaqa and, eventually, by focusing on the khums as a revenue category which was reserved for the discretionary use of the Shiʿi 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 Shiʿism 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; 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

---

5 See Laura Veccia Vaglieri, “Fadak,” *EI2*. 
these lands to provide revenue for the public treasury. Fiscal issues continued to form an important bone of contention in opposition to the Umayyads right up until the ‘Abbasid revolution. 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-Kāẓim, 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

---

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 wakāls 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. 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 Qurʾān, and the reports of the actions of the Prophet and the early Caliphs. While references to religious taxation are scattered throughout the Qurʾān, in particular, two adjacent suras of the Qurʾān 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. *Ṣadaqa* and *zakāt* are used largely synonymously both in the Qurʾān as well as in the later legal literature. The key passage later used to establish the right of the Caliph/Imam to exact tax on the community was Qurʾān 9:103:

\[
خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِم بِهَا وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلاَتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَّهُمْ وَاللهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ
\]

8 Norman Calder does have an article on *zakāt*, “Zakāt in Imāmī Shīʿī 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 adistinctive valency, both in the Qurʾān 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, “Ṣadaḳa,” *EI2.*
Take ṣadaqa from their property to purify them and cleanse\textsuperscript{11} them by that, and pray for them. For your prayers are reassurance for them. And God is hearing and knowing.\textsuperscript{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 وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَالْعَامِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللهَِّ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ اللهَِّ وَاللهَُّ 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

\textsuperscript{11} Or perhaps, “cause them increase.”

\textsuperscript{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 (\textit{The Koran Interpreted} (London: Oxford University Press, 1964)) and Ali (\textit{The Qur’an Translation} (Elmhurst, N.Y. : Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, 2001)).
**anfāl, ghanîma 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:

YPX0QD388EHZ 5T05E803689Q4T4879H7

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:

YPX0QD388EHZ 5T05E803689Q4T4879H7

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 booty\(^{15}\) 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’an are vague, allowing much room for later jurists to argue about interpretation. See Paul Heck, “Taxation,” *EQ*; Rudolph Peters, “Booty,” *EQ*.

\(^{14}\) Qur’an 8:1.

\(^{15}\) Here ‘booty’ is referred to in the verbal form related to *ghanîma*, rather than *anfāl* as in the previous quotation.

\(^{16}\) See Norman Calder, “Khums in Imāmī Shi‘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 Muhammad’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’. 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 Shiʿism and Sunnism both emerged in an atmosphere of foment and resistance to the Umayyad caliphate. 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 (mawādiʿ), amongst those entitled to it.

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 Qurʾān, 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 Qurʾān 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 ʿAbbasid 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 ʿAbbaasids 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 hadith 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 Shiʿi and Sunnī 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 ʿīd al-ḤaRestore deleted text
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 Shiʿi 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 šadaqa, but to be distinguished from the šadaqa which is synonymous with zakāt, meaning obligatory taxes or alms. In addition, for

---

later jurists referring back to Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān, 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 *fayʾ* lands which, became the patrimony of all Muslims, through providing *kharāj* tax revenue for the state. Among the Shiʿa, we see Zaydis, who had a practical interest in the administration of autonomous realms, placing great emphasis on the land-based tax categories. In this land-based system of classification, the *fayʾ* 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. The *kharāj* tax levied on the *fayʾ* lands was, in its classical formulation, understood as a flat-rate tax according crop type, to be distinguished, therefore, from the tenth (ʿ*ushr*) levied upon lands as a share of the crop at harvest time. The ʿ*ushr* was levied upon land which had been distributed amongst the Muslims, and is therefore dealt with by jurists under the rubric of *zakāt*. *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. There were also peace treaty-governed *sulh* 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

---

25 Though this changed under the administrations of different Caliphs. See T. Sato, “ʿUshr.” *EI2*.
26 F. Løkkegaard, “Fayʾ,” *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.\(^\text{28}\) 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.

\[^{28}\text{See Kulaynī, Kāfī, 1:543.}\]
Table 2: Canonical taxation categories classed according to tax type and land type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ṣadaqa/zakāt</td>
<td>Tax on total wealth of Muslims who own above a certain amount, levied at different rates on agricultural produce, livestock, gold and silver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghanīma/ maghānim</td>
<td>Initially, the spoils of war, later also extended to other kinds of one-off windfalls and discoveries, including the fifth (<em>khums</em>) levied on the produce of mines, minerals, discovered treasure and pearls from the sea. Note that <em>anfāl</em> appears to have been largely synonymous with <em>ghanīma</em> (<em>Q: maghnam</em>) initially, but was later classified as a type of land. (See below).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kharāj</td>
<td>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 the <em>ʿushr</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ʿushr, pl. ʿushūr</td>
<td>Literally, a “tenth”: a land tax, but based on a share of the crop, rather than a fixed rate like the <em>kharāj</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jizya</em></td>
<td>A poll-tax on non-Muslims who submitted to Muslim rule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Land type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Kharāj/fay'</em> lands</td>
<td>Land conquered and divided between Muslims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anfāl lands</td>
<td>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. These all belong directly to the Imam/Caliph and are levied at the rate of a fifth (<em>khums</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lands governed by peace-treaty (<em>sulḥ</em>)</td>
<td>These lands are taxed according to the tribute agreement arranged under the terms of the treaty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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, 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 Şādiq 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. 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. 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 historian 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 Shiʿi 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*. 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. 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. One of the central questions that I will address regarding the Shiʿi theory of the *khums*, is how and why did the Imami Shiʿa come to develop a distinctive theory of *khums*? If the Shiʿi 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*, *zakat*, and other revenues due to the Imam, but devotes little attention to the development of these as legal categories. See *Occultation*, especiably 36, 79-83. Buyukkara, “Imami-Shiʿi Movement”; “Schism”; Wardrop, “Lives,” especially 178-184.
33 Modarressi, *Crisis*. 13-16.
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. ʿAlī’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 hadīth that lā yuʾammaru (or lā yaliyanna) mufāʿ ʿalā mufiyʾ, “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 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 Qurʾān 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 Shiʿi jurists. Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar 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 Shiʿi 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*.

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.\textsuperscript{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, \textit{in primis}, šadaqa/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.\textsuperscript{39} But tax reformers like ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz continue to place emphasis upon šadaqa as the central tax type to be levied on Muslims.\textsuperscript{40} In addition, we know from papyri that šadaqa/zakāt was indeed collected and distributed by governmental authorities, at least in Egypt, possibly suggesting a revival of the centralized governmental collection of

\textsuperscript{38} See, for example Tūsī, \textit{Khilāf}, 2:32-3, in which Tūsī summarizes the positions of al-Shāfi‘ī and Ibn Hanbal. According to Tūsī, both al-Shāfi‘ī, and Ibn Hanbal 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.

\textsuperscript{39} Such as rusūm (see Cahen, “Kharājd,” \textit{EI2}), and mukūs (see W. Björkman, “Maks” \textit{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 šadaqa as the only kind of tax paid by Muslims; see Peter C. Hennigan \textit{The Birth of a Legal Institution}, 72. It is likely that this

\textsuperscript{40} ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz is recorded as having reaffirmed the operation of šadaqa as the only kind of tax paid by Muslims, see Peter C. Hennigan, \textit{The Birth of a Legal Institution} (Boston: Brill, 2004), 72.
these canonical taxes.\textsuperscript{41} This gives the discussions regarding the payment or non-payment of zakāt to the authorities a potentially subversive tone. Whether Sunni or Shiʿi, the argument that it was not legitimate to pay zakāt to the caliphal authorities implies an oppositional stance towards the state.

\textbf{2.7.1 Zakāt/ṣadaqa: distribute it yourself}

The early Shiʿa 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 Shiʿi 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 Shiʿa 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:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Sudayr the money-changer said: I said to Abū ἦʿAbd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq], “Should I feed a Muslim begger 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 (dāʿā) 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 (dāniq44).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:

42 That is, someone who is a fellow Shiʿi, 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, dāniq and mithqāl, see Abu ἦʿUbayd al-Qāsim Ibn Sallām, The Book of Revenue (Kitāb al-amwāl) (Reading, U.K.: Garnet, 2005), 480-1.
45 Kulaynī, Kāfī, 4:14.
‘Alī b. Ibrāhîm [reported] from … Burayd al-‘Ijlī from Abū Ja`far [al-Bāqir] and Abū ʿAbd Allāh [al-Ṣādiq] they spoke regarding a man who belonged to one of those heresies (ahwāʾ); the Ḥarūriyya [i.e. Khārijites], the Murjiʿa or the ʿUthmāniyya 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 ḥajj? Is it not encumbent 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 Shiʿa].”

This is a remarkable position to take, setting a high bar for conversion to the Imaami 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, but nevertheless, during the time of Baqir and Sadiq the Shiʿa discourse on canonical taxes reflects an 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. This report is also interesting from the perspective of dating, as the ‘heretical’ groups mentioned are noticeably rooted in the

---

46 Kulaynî, Kāfî, 3:545.
47 Kulaynî, Kāfî, 3:545.
48 Kulaynî, Kāfî, 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’anic 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:

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

... Rafā’a b. Mūsā [said] that he heard Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Ṣādiq] (AS) say: “God imposed nothing upon this community graver than zakāt, and the majority of them perish in it.”\(^\text{49}\)

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 Šādiq 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:

\[
\text{وَوَى حَرِيزَ ، عَنْ زَارَةَ ، وَمُحَمَّدَ بْنِ مُسْلِمَ أَنَّهَا قَالَا لأَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامَ : " أَرَأَيْتُ قُولَ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ }\\ \text{إنَّمَا الصدقات للفقراء والمساكين والعاملين عليها والمؤلفة قلوبهم وفي الرقاب والغارمين، وفي سبيل الله وابن سبيل فريضة من الله." أكل هؤلاء يعطى وإن كان لا يعرف؟ فقال: إن الإمام يعطي هؤلاء جميعا لأنهم يقررون له بالطاعة، قال زاررة: قلت: فإن كانوا لا يعرفون؟ فقال: يا زاررة لو كان يعطي من يعرف دون من لا.}
\]

\(^{49}\) Kulaynī, Kāfī, 3:497.
Hūrayz reported from Zurāra and Mūhammad b. Muslim that they both spoke to Abū `Abd Allāh [Ṣādiq] (AS): “Do you see the verse, “The sadaqāt 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…”

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 وتزكيهم به."

Abū ʿAbd 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 بكر قال : سمعت أبا عبد الله عليه السلام يقول : إنني لآخذ من أحدكم الدِهم وإني لمن أكثر أهل المدينة مالا ما أريد بذلك إلا أن تطهروا.

Ibn Bukayr reported: I heard Abū ʿAbd 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, Kāfī, 1:537.
53 Kulaynī, Kāfī, 1: 538; Ibn Bābūya, Faqīh, 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-Shiʿa, this would have the effect of setting the Imami Shiʿa 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 Qurʾān’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 Shiʿa 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”:

Уәقәүәб әңә Шүәйәб сәәләт: Сәәләт Әбә Ӏаәдәл (аля әүәлләм) әңә сәәләтә, күә хәләнә иңә әңә әләләнә бәә әңә зәқәтә.

Yaʿqūb b. Shuʿayb said: I asked Ṣādiq about the ʿushūr [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.”

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 Shiʿism, 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. 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 ʿushūr tithes which are properly considered a part of zakāt.
55 Kulaynī, Kāfī, 3:543.
56 “Sahl b. al-Yasaʾ reported that he, when he founded Sahlābād, and he asked Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā [al-Kāẓim] 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 encumbent upon you, but if the Sultan does not take
Abū ʿAbd 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.”

Here, then, a dispensation is being granted regarding the forceful extraction of taxes, though, but that in the case of voluntary action, the Shiʿa 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 Shiʿa 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, Ṣādiq. The men who transmitted these reports appear to have needed to explicate a change in practice or policy between the two

---

57 Kulaynī, Kāfī, 3: 543-4. See also the following hadith: “I asked [Ṣādiq] about the man who inherits land or buys it and pays its kharāj to the Sultan. Is the tithe (ʿushr) encumbent upon him? [The Imam] said, “No.”” Kulaynī, Kāfī, 3: 543. In another hadith we are told, “Abū al-Ḥasan [presumably al-Kāẓīm] (AS) was asked about a man from whom those ones (ḥāʾulāʾ) [i.e. the caliphal authorities] took the zakāt of his property or the fifth of his booty (khums ghanīmatihī) 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, Faqīh, 2:42. This hadith is also discussed below.
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 فأمرواهم أن يحتسبوا به فجال فكري والله لهم ، فقلت له : يا أبا إنهم
إن سمعوا إذا لم يزك أحد فقال : يا بني حق أحب الله أن يظهره

Sulaymān b. Khālid said: I heard Abū ʿAbd 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 (yuẓhiruhu).”

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 Shiʿi Imam, as legitimate.

58 Kulayni, Kāfī, 3:543.
Ṣādiq, 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 Ṣādiq speaks about his relationship with his father’s teachings, Ṣādiq is asked about the Qurʾānic *ghanīma* verse (8:41), and Ṣādiq glosses the verse as follows:

هي والله الإفادة يوما بيوم إلا أن أبي جعل شيعته في حل لزكوا.

“*[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, Ṣādiq 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 Ṣādiq, 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 Ṣādiq’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 Ṣādiq 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.

\(^{60}\) Kulaynī, *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, Şādiq 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.

Abū Baṣīr said: We were with Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Ṣādiq] (AS), and with us were some the people of money (aṣḥāb al-amwāl) and they mentioned zakāt and Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Ṣādiq] (AS) said: “The payer of zakāt is not praised for it, for it is only an obvious thing (shayʾ ẓāhir), 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, Şādiq 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 Jaʿfar’s following, as Asatryan has shown.64 Certainly Jaʿfar’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 Şādiq’s auditors, so that Abū Başīr is forced to ask “What is this ‘known duty’ incumbent upon us?” Thus Şādiq 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 ) لعمر الساباطي : يا عمار أنت رب مال كثير ؟


63 Kulaynī, Kāfī, 3:499.
One of the people of Sābāṭ said: Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Ṣādiq] said to ʿAmmār al-Sābāṭī, “Oh ʿAmmār, are you very wealthy?”

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

[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?”

He replied, “Yes.”

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

He replied, “Yes.”

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

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 Jaʿfar 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 Shiʿa, 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 Qurʾānically-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 *Kāfī*. 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 Qurʾān 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 الخيبري ويونس بن ظبيان قالا : سمعنا أبا عبد الله عليه السلام يقول ما من شئ أحب إلى الله من إخراج الدِاهم إلى الامام وإن الله ليجعل له الدِهم في الجنة مثل جبل أحد ، ثم قال : إن الله تعالى

⁶⁹ *Kāfī*, 1:537-8.
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 Qurʾān which is not used in reference to zakāt/ṣadaqa, thus suggesting a unique canonical Qurʾānic category, and emphasizing the particular reward attached to such gifts. One other hadith in this chapter uses the same passage of the Qurʾān, 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 Qurʾān was being reread carefully to furnish experimental new categories of revenue for the Shiʿi 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 Kāfī, 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’fī:

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’fī 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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{71} Mushegh Asatryan, “Bankers and Politics,” 2.
towards paying zakāt to non-Shi’a, Şâdiq 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 Şâdiq 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 Şâdiq’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, Şâdiq 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 Şâdiq 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 harām has been mixed with halāl.\(^{72}\) 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 Şâdiq.

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 Shiʿi 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 Shiʿi) 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 Shiʿi 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 Qurʾān. In this way, the Shiʿi conceptualization of *khums* occurred during a time when the legal system as a whole

---

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 Qurʾān 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 Šādiq, 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 understood as harmonizing with the Sunni conception of *ghanīma*: “Bāqir said: “As for the mines of …
metal… well, a fifth is due upon them.” 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 display 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 شئ فأن لِلّ خمس ه و للرسول ولذي القربى” قال : هم قرابة رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله والخمس لِلّ وللرسول ولنا.

Muḥammad b. Muslim reported from Abū Jaʿfar [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 relations of God’s Prophet (SAAA), and the fifth (*khums*) is for God and for the Prophet and for us.”

This statement refers again to Qurʾān 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

---

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.
ʿAlids 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*. 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 (*maʿūna*)” 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.

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

> عن زِارَة 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 (*fayyʾ*), though if he had wished, he would have divided it between them.

---

81 Once *khums* includes income, *maʿūna* comes to refer to household necessities, thus *khums* comes to be understood as a tax on surplus income, rather than total income.
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 صارحا، أو قوم أعطوا بأيديهم، وكل أرض خربة ويطلس الأودية فهو لرسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله وهو للإمام 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.”

Another tradition says anfāl includes property of a man who dies without heir, 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.” 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 (maʿūna)”, 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 Shiʿi Imam, or merely the Caliph. Clearly the one is derived from the other. Shiʿi 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
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 Qurʾān.\(^89\) The *ghanīma* verses in the Qurʾān 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, Ḧāfi, 1:546; 1:548.
\(^88\) Kulaynī, Ḧāfi, 1:546.
\(^89\) As well as, of course other entirely distinct ritual practices such as ablution.
\(^90\) Q 8:69.
And Zakariyyā b. Mālik asked Abū ʿAbd 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 sadaqa, 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/sadaqa, Sādiq 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 ʿAlī 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 ʿAlid approval of various revolts like that of Zayd b. ʿAlī 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 generously [gift-giving] to us is permitted (ḥalāl).”  

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.  

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 fayʾ, and thereby dissimilar from zakāt in that it can be given to rich and poor alike. Šaḥnūn, 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 Šādiq, or perhaps to the time of his son, Kāẓim, 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 Šādiq and Kāẓim. Returning to a report we mentioned above, Šādiq 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:

> **I asked Abū ʿAbd 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 ʿAbd 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 Shiʿa a dispensation to pay zakāt (*abī jaʿala shīʿatahu fī ḥillin an yuzakkū*).”**

---

This “profit from day to day” suggests something other than the one-off windfall profit of war-booty suggested in this verse of the Qurʾān, 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. 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, overlapping 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-kāfī*, edited by ʿAlī ʿĀshūr (Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī 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 ʿAlī al-Hādī, given the shortness of the isnād, in which *ifāda* is stated to include the profits of agriculture and trade. Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 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 Kāẓim98

With Mūsā al-Kāẓim, 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:

98There is a certain difficulty over distinguishing Kāẓim and Riḍā, due to the fact that they both have the same kunya, Abū al-Hasan. In general, however, where there is doubt about which Abū al-Hasan is meant, we can assumed it to be Kāẓim, due to the fact that Riḍā often goes by the moniker Abū al-Hasan II, suggesting that Kāẓim was regarded as the default.
The righteous servant [Kāẓim] (AS)\(^\text{99}\) said: The *khums* is taken from five things: from booty (*ghanāʾim*), and pearl-diving, treasure, mines, and salt-flats (*mallāha*). The *khums* is taken from all of those categories (*sunūf*), 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*. Kāẓim clarifies the ‘five things’ which make up *khums*, and their proper recipients. Crucially, Kāẓim explicitly arrogates the entirety of the *khums* to the family of the Prophet, apparently for


\(^{100}\) 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 *sadaqa/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 Kāẓim as a more revolutionary figure than his father.101 Again, however, we should note that the solutions Kāẓim 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 ʿAbbasids] took the *zakāt* of his property or the fifth of his booty (*khums* ghanīmatihi) 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 Kāẓim 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 ʿAlī al-Riḍā was also called Abū al-Ḥasan, though generally, if left unqualified, this name refers to the father, rather than the son.
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 Kāẓim standing up for the traditional rights of ahl al-bayt, by accusing the Caliph Mahdī for not restoring the rights of the family of the Prophet to the Fadak lands.105 Thus, we see that Kāẓim continues to be upholding earlier traditions of a very public rhetoric of outrage over the misappropriate 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 Kāẓim in trouble with the Caliphs, leading to his imprisonment later under Hārūn al-Rashīd.106

The statements from Kāẓim, 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 Kāẓim 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.

Imamate. Thus, by the time of Kāẓim’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 Kāẓim, the Seventh Imam was in occultation, and the canonical taxes belonged to him alone, on his return. The collection of the canonical taxes put the wakīls of Kāẓim 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 Kāẓim both a very practical matter and also one with important symbolic dimensions for the continuity of the community.

Kāẓim 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 فليزور قبور صلحاء إخواننا.

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

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

107 In Kashshī, the earliest circumstance in which a wakīl is mentioned the succession dispute between the qat’iyya and the wāqifa following Kāẓim’s death.
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 šadaqa/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 Hashimite 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 Qurʾānic 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, 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, ʿAlī 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

---

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 *wakil* in Kashshī’s biographical dictionary of the Shi‘i notables is in references to the *wakīls* who protested against the Imamate of Riḍā, withholding the canonical taxes from him, and instead upheld the ‘*wāqīfī*’ 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 بالاستنكتم وتزون عنا حقا جعله الله لنا وجعلنا له وهو الخمس لا نجعل ، لا نجعل ، لا نجعل لا أحد منكم في حل من الخمس.

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 yajʿaluhum fī hillin min al-khums*). [The Imam] said, “… We will not, we will not, we will not grant any person amongst you a dispensation.”

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 *wāqīfī* and the challenge they presented to the legitimacy of the new

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 الآذن في الخمس فكتب إليه. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم... لا يحل 112 المال إلا من وجه أهله الله وإن الخمس عوننا على ديننا وعلى عيالتنا وعلى موالينا، وما نبذلله ونشتري من أعراضنا من أعراضنا ممن نخاف سطوته، فلا تزووه عنا ولا تحرموا أنفسكم دعاءنا ما قدتم عليه، فإن إخراجه مفتاح زقكم 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 Kāẓim – 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 Kāẓim, and the large break-away group of the wāqifa who denied the Imamate of Riḍā, and withheld canonical taxes from him. 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 Kāẓim appears to have been a charismatic innovator, establishing a parallel Shi‘i shadow fiscal economy, and publicly 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 wāqifī revolt. The requests for exemption may not necessarily have been made by wāqifīs, 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 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,

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.

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 Jaʿfar 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 *daʿwa* which gave rise to a number of ʿAlid revolts, but was disrupted by the most successful example of such a *daʿwa*: the
ʿAbbasid revolution? Even after the rise of the ʿAbbasids 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-Kāẓim in 183/799, the collection of canonical taxes from the community was developed enough for the agents to precipitate a crisis when the wāqifī 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-ʿAskarī 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 Shiʿi 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 Shiʿa. 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 Shiʿi 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 Shiʿi 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 ʿAbd 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 ʿAlī. 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-Kūfī**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baghdad (5)</td>
<td>Al-ʿAmrī [ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, or Ḥafṣ b. ʿAmr]</td>
<td>First Envoy in Twelver tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ḥājīz</td>
<td>Important wakīl of the early nāḥiya. Active in Baghdad and Samarra. Seems to deal with the east: Merv, Balkh. Doubts surrounding his authority were countered by a rescript issued in the name of the Hidden Imam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Al-ʿAṭṭār</td>
<td>This probably refers to ʿAlī b. Sulaymān b. Rashīd al-ʿAṭṭār al-Baghdādī, mentioned by Kashshī as being a keeper of a storehouse (khazāna) on behalf of the Eleventh Imam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role and Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kufa (1)</td>
<td>Al-ʿĀṣīmī</td>
<td>Transmitter of hadith highlighting Ḥājīz’s role in the nāḥiya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahwāz (1)</td>
<td>Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār</td>
<td>\textit{Wakīl} for Ahwāz. Famously doubted the Occultation, and the Envoyship of Abū Jaʿfar but was eventually won over. Son of a \textit{wakīl}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qumm (1)</td>
<td>Aḥmad b. Ishāq</td>
<td>Prominent early-Occultation regional \textit{wakīl}, scholar and hadith transmitter. In the \textit{thīqa} hadith he appears in favor of ʿAmrīs and \textit{ghayba}. He appears as the Qummī delegate to Samarra to find the Imam. (See Chapter 5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamadān (1)</td>
<td>Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayy (2)</td>
<td>Al-Bassāmī</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Al-Asadī</td>
<td>Probably the father or some other relation of Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Asadī,\textsuperscript{iv} the \textit{wakīl} at Rayy who succeeded Ḥājīz (see Chapter 5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ādharbayjān (1)</td>
<td>Al-Qāsim b. al-ʿAlāʾ</td>
<td>Sent money from \textit{wāqf} of Eleventh Imam to \textit{wikāla}.$^v \textit{Wakīl}$ since time of al-Hādī, Tenth$^vi$ succeeded in post by his son Ḥasan.$^vii$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{iv} Seeing as Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī is in the \textit{isnād} of this report, it would seem unlikely (though not impossible), that he should be one of the \textit{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 \textit{wakīls}. As we will see, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī appears to have belonged to the second generation of \textit{wakīls} in the Occultation era, based on his death date reported in the \textit{rijāl} literature, see below, Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{v} Hussain, \textit{Occultation}, 124.

\textsuperscript{vi} Hussain, \textit{Occultation}, 95.

\textsuperscript{vii} Hussain, \textit{Occultation}, 124.
| Nishapur (1) | Muḥammad b. Shādhān [b. Nuʿaym] | Mentioned in a rescript (tawqīʿ) of Twelfth Imam as “a man of our Shiʿa”\(^{\text{viii}}\) Related to Faḍl b. Shādhān the Nishapuri scholar |

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 nāhiya.\(^1\) 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 ʿAmrī 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

\(^{\text{viii}}\) Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 483-5.

\(^1\)The 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 degredation 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 ṣī ṭ 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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Name or description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baghdad (11 named)</td>
<td>Abū al-Qāsim b. Abī Ḥulays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abū ṣ Ābd Allāh al-Kindī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abū ṣ Ābd Allāh al-Junaydī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hārūn al-Qazzāz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Al-Nīlī (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abū al-Qāsim b. Dubays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abū ṣ Ābd Allāh b. Farrukh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masrūr al-Ṭabbākh the <em>mawlā</em> of Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Āḥmad, son of al-Ḥasan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muḥammad, son of al-Ḥasan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ishḥāq al-Kātib from Banū Nībakht [=Nawbakht]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The man with the camel fat (<em>niwā</em>), or perhaps date stone (nawāt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamadān (3 named)</td>
<td>The man with the sealed purse (<em>ṣāḥib al-ṣurra al-makhtūma</em>)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muḥammad b. Kashmard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ 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 Bābīya, Kamāl, 486-7.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ja’far b. Ḥamdān</td>
<td>Muḥammad b. ṬUmān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dīnawar (3 named)</td>
<td>Ḥasan b. Hārūn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alḥmad b. Ukhiyya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abū al-Ḥasan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isfahan (1)</td>
<td>Ibn Bādhshāla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Şaymara (1)</td>
<td>Zaydān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qumm (5 named)</td>
<td>Al-Ḥasan b. al-Naḍr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muḥammad b. Muḥammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ishāq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>His father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Al-Ḥasan b. Ya’qūb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayy (5 named)</td>
<td>Al-Qāsim b. Mūsā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>His son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abū Muḥammad b. Hārūn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘The man with the pebble (ṣāhib al-ḥasāt) ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Alī b. Muḥammad [ʿAllān al-Kulaynī?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Kulaynī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abū Ja’far al-Raffā’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qazwīn (2 named)</td>
<td>Mirdās</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Alī b. Aḥmad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khujand</td>
<td>Bakhšv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukhāra</td>
<td>Hind (Kashmir)vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Āba [near Qumm]</td>
<td>Wāsitvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merviv</td>
<td>Kufaviii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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. 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

---

1 Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 509.
6 Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 486; 493; 505. It should be noted that this story has a legendary, fairy-tale quality to it.
7 Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 486; 493; 505.
8 Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 517. It should be noted, however, that this report mentions a Qummi 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 hajj, but feeling anxious about the security situation in the country. Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 490-1. It would seem strange for someone to be based in Yemen, yet planning a Hajj from Baghdad.
each other removes the possibility that these proofs were concocted by conspiracy. Nonetheless, there are some significant patterns that it is safe to extract. While a *wakil* is mentioned for Kufa, no non-*wakils* 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 Qummî, 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? 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 Imams, or the later Twelver orthodoxy: the Nu`ayrîs, 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.

The key locations mentioned both in the Muḥammad al-Kūfî’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-Kulaynî 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. 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.

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. Notably Ahwāz was one of the key locations from which the Ismaili da‘wa appears to have first emerged. The community in Nishapur is mentioned by Ibn Bābūya himself as a continued problem-location even as we approach the classical era. This perhaps was part of an ongoing series of debates that we see in the pre-Oculation era.

5 For the composition of Baghdadi and Qummi Shi‘ism, see Andrew Newman, The Formative Period of Twelver Shi‘ism: Hadīth 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.
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.
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-ʿAskarī’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 Hajj pilgrimage) was a practice that was increasing in significance in this period. Thus, it is not surprising that some early-Occultation reports Kamāl locate the Twelfth Imam in the Ḥijāz. 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

---

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. Ibn Bābüya 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-ʿAskarī in Şuryā near Medina, the birthplace of the Tenth Imam, ‘Alī al-Hāḍī. More detail is preserved in the Nuṣayrī tradition, in a version of the same report quoted in Khaṣibī’s al-Hidāya al-kubrā in which a believer goes in search of the Imam in Medina and Şuryā. 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 (zulla) of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī near a palace (qaṣr) in Şuryā. 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: Imams 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 consensuses about this new phase of the Imamate, or in some cases converting away from the perplexities of Imami Shi’ism. 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 ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī 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 Ismāʿīlīs: their History and Doctrines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 126.

14 Ibn Bābüya, Kamāl, 491-2.


16 Khaṣibī, Hidāya, 277-8.

consensus formation is dramatized in another report in Khaṣībī’s *Hidāya*. In this report, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Madā‘inī goes on *Hajj* and starts asking around at Medina, and hears that the Imam is living in Samarra (*al-‘askar)*. He writes to Ja‘far ‘the liar’ to ask him about the Imam and the legatee (*waṣī*) after him, and we learn that Ja‘far writes to the Qummīs to demand his financial rights from them. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq al-Qummī corresponds with Ja‘far and asks him some technical questions (*masā’il* – 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 Ja‘far’s probity as Imam, but Ja‘far gives him no response.\(^\text{18}\) The narrative of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Madā‘inī on *Hajj* appears to have been compiled together with the Qummī correspondence with Ja‘far ‘the liar,’ but nonetheless it gives as a sense of the interregional communication between different Shi‘i 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, Ja‘far ‘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 Ja‘far’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 *tawāf* circumambulation of the Ka‘ba.\(^\text{19}\) 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

---


\(^{19}\) 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,\(^\text{20}\) some of these are explicitly placed in the mouths of earlier Imams, like Jaʿfar al-Sādiq,\(^\text{21}\) 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 Shiʿi 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 Shiʿi 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 Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī, ‘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

\[^{20}\text{For example one reported by the Second ‘Envoy,’ Muhammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī, Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 440.}\]

\[^{21}\text{For example, see Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 440.}\]
say that Qummīs travelling to Baghdad to bring money to the nāhiya 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 uncertainly 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), or a related formula to identify him as the Imam. There was an interdiction placed on referring to the Twelfth Imam by name. 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 Qāʾīm, 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 tawqiʿ 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 wakils 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 Shiʿa 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 uncertainly 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-gharîm
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. 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-nāhiya (see below). Thus, if ‘al-gharîm’ 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. In this sense, the Imam and his administrative institutions are combined and indistinguishable.

27 Massingon, for example, states that al-gharîm 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,’ 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,” which fits the activities assigned to it in the sources, though does not explain the origin of this terminology.

Most importantly, the word nāhiya 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. In the pre-Occultation period the word nāhiya 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. This would explain why the word nāhiya 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 nāhiya as being a location, not just a person or institution.

29 Modarressi, Crisis, 11.
31 Najāshī mentions Muḥammad b. Ḍāl 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 nāhiya, 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” (qasadtu al-nāḥiya)\textsuperscript{33} appears to parallel the phrase “I made for Samarra” (qasadtu Surra man raʾā)\textsuperscript{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 Jaʿfar 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,\textsuperscript{35} and by extension, the Imam himself.\textsuperscript{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)\textsuperscript{37} and servants and slaves (ghulām,\textsuperscript{38} jāriya)\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{33} Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 487.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 490.
\textsuperscript{35} See Bābūya, Kamāl, 498.
\textsuperscript{36} See, for example, Kashshī, Rijāl, 394.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 474-5.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 467-9.
\textsuperscript{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 (ḥājib), 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, 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-nāhiya 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 for 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

---


\(^44\) 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 *Rījāl*, 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-Nisābūrī, the Imam and a rival *wakīl*, “The Imam’s Knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nisābūrī (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, Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī ‘the Liar’ due to the incompatibility of the allegiances of the wakīls to his deceased brother and Jaʿfar. The word Envoy (safīr) is not heavily attested before the Occultation,46 but appears to have been employed by Nuʿmānī 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 being being 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 Ḥājīz among the Envoys, however as we will see, Ḥājīz did in fact appear in a role very similar to the role of Envoy ultimately established by Abū Jaʿfar and Ibn Rawḥ. See Sachedina, Islamic Messiahism, 86.
48 See below, Chapter 8.
49 The the clearest statement about the office of high-wakīlete 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 tawqīʿāt 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 Saffrate to be taken as a reliable description of the state of the office of wakīl upon the death of al-ʿAskari, 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 KamālNote 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 Saffrate 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 Jaʿfar as successor to his father, Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, v.2, 283, 43; and Ibn Rūḥ as Abū Jaʿfar’s successor, Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 503-4.
b. Āḥmad al-wakīl’,\(^50\) or Ḥājiz, or an unnamed figure. However, a named figure is never termed deputy (nāʾib) 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 hadith, 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. Rūh.” 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 Wāṣiṭ”\(^{52}\) – clearly from the context, the pre-eminent member of the Imami community in Wāṣiṭ. 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 Ḥājīz 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, saying of the Qummīs: “The people are messengers, and nothing is incumbent upon a messenger except a clear communication (al-qawmu rusulun wa mā ʿalā 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 mustaʾjīrūna) 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 Jaʿfar ‘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, Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad Ibn Mattīl, a high-placed Baghdad wakīl who at one time was expected to succeed to the pre-eminent position of leadership, is disgusted that he is sent by Abū Jaʿfar 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)?” It is likely that there is a political valence to this report that expresses something of the relationship between Abū Jaʿfar 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. In Kulaynī’s Kāfī and the Hidāya of Khaṣībī, another term appears: ‘porter,’ (ḥammāl), which appears equivalent to rasūl messenger or wakīl agent. 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 Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Mattīl when asked to transport money on behalf of the wikāla.

---

58 See Hussain, Occultation, 108.
59 Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 505.
60 See, for example, Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 495.
61 Kāfī, 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 nāḥiya, 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 ʿAqid and Badr, below, Chapter 4.
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 ʿAqīd and Badr the eunuchs, in Chapter 4, and also the possibility that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿAbd 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 nāhiya 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-ʿAskarī. 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, but also as matchmakers, 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). 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, dihqān, marzubān) 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; Khaṣṣībī, *Hidāya*, 249.

70 Khaṣṣībī, *Hidāya*, 264.

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

72 Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 516; 517.


(washshāʾ), and apothecary (ʿattār). A further study that traced the appearance of these epithets in the Shiʿi 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 a 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-ʿAskarī 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**

---

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-Nisābūrī (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 Jaʿfar. 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-ʿAskarī’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 Shiʿi 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:

Naṣr b. al-Ṣabbāḥ al-Balkhī said: 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 misappropriate of funds.

---

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 ablate before handling the money, and the way it is earned must not be harām in other ways – such as deriving from the sale of a singing girl.\textsuperscript{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 nāhiya, but half of which is returned due to its partial ownership by a Sunni.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Safīrate of Ibn Rawḥ.\textsuperscript{83} These reports indicate that the impulse to send money to the nāhiya 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 nāhiya, there was also an opposing impulse to withhold money from the nāhiya 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.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 483-5.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 509.
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provenance</th>
<th>Circumstances</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Received by</th>
<th>Page no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qummis</td>
<td>They arrived at Samarra after death of Eleventh Imam, looking for his successor</td>
<td>1010 dinars</td>
<td>Servant of the boy Imam</td>
<td>475-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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-ʿAskarī, when a certain ʿĀtiq Ahmad b. Ishāq, accompanied by Saʿd b. Ṭabd Allāh from Qumm brought to the house of the Imam in Samarra a leather bag (*jirāb*) stuffed with a garment from Tabaristan (*kisāʿ tabarī*) 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 contributers, and whether the money was pure or impure, Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 456-8.
| **Man from the Sawād** | Instructed not to send 400 dirhams from the estate of his cousin | x (less 400 dirhams) | al-gharīm | 486 |
| **Merv community** | Money gathered by a kātib of al-Khūzistānī. | 1000 dinars | Al-Ḥajīzī | 488 |
| **Man from Balkh** | Sent money anonymously, but was named in the reply. | 5 dinars | Ḥājīz | 488 |
| **Muḥammad b. Hārūn** | Spending the night in Baghdad, he thinks he will to give, and someone immediately appears to receive the contribution | Ḥawānīṭ worth 530 dinars | Not mentioned | 492 |
| **Ibn Ramīs/Rumays** | Ḥājīz forgot to deliver the dinars, and the Imam wrote asking for them | 10 dinars | Ḥājīz | 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 (*qawm*) of believers female cousin, whose name was thus omitted from *duʿā* prayer in return

Baghdad community Abū Jaʿfar sends the money 1000 dinars ‘the *Wakīl*’ in Samarra

- - A robe (*thawb*) Al-ʿAmrī 502

Zaynab, a woman from Āba She approaches Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad Ibn Mattīl as an intermediary 300 dinars Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ, the Third Envoy 504

Nishapur community *Wakīl* Muḥammad b. Shādhān collected money found it short 20 dirhams, and added his own money. 500 dinars Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī *wakīl* for Rayy 509

Qummī cloth-merchant (*bazzāz*) It was split in two and half was sent back because part-owned by a Sunni (*murjiʿī*) A fine robe (*thawb nafīs*) The Imam (his Lord – *mawlā*) 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.\(^8_5\) 1000 dinars is the sum that is paid by the Qummīs and by Abū Jaʿfar 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-Kāẓim]’s agents had large sums for him in their possession, from ten to thirty and even seventy thousand dinars.”\(^8_6\) It does seem likely that the two most significant Shiʿi 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.

\(^8_5\) 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.

\(^8_6\) 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. Thus 1000 dinars would represent around 150,000 raṭl 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 raṭl 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.

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.

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, though there is at least one waqf stated as

---


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 Jaʿfar: a man named Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī 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 Jaʿfar 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 wakīls.

92 See for example, the continuation of pre-Occultation waqfs of ʿAlī al-Hādī, the Tenth Imam, Ibn Bābüya, Kamāl, 522; and al-Qāsim b. ‘Alā’ looking after the endowment belonging to al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, 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 (qabāḍ, qubūḍ) note (ruqʿa), the letter (kitāb, risāla), and the rescript (tawqīʿ). Receipts (qabāḍ, 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar. When the wakīl asks for a receipt, Ibn Rawḥ complains to Abū Jaʿfar, and Abū Jaʿfar 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 (ruqʿa) 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 (duʿāʿ) 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 ruqʿa, but follows the format of other accounts of ruqʿa 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, though it is very likely that some of them were meant for wider distribution. Note, however, that not all *tawqīʿ* rescripts clearly appear to have been issued from one of the canonical Envoys, or the well-known *wakīls*. An important subcategory of letters to the Imam are sets of legal questions (*masāʾil*) which are often the occasion for *tawqīʿ* rescripts. 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. 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 ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī (Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 91), and later legal and doctrinal *masāʾ il* works such as the various *Masāʾ il* of Mufid, such as *Ajwibat al-masāʾ il al-ḥājibiyya*, also known as *al-Masāʾ il 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.’ 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. 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 stamp – 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. 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.
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, in another case, the wakīl’s contribution is accepted, and acknowledged by the Imam in a kind of receipt. 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. 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 transfers 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 ʿAbbasid 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-Ṣaydālānī, 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 Jaʿfar 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.  

3.4.6 Redistribution of money and blessings
The final element of the structuring of the wikala-network to which we will give some attention is the question of how the money and contributions to the nāhiya were used. On a purely pragmatic level, there were costs to the Imam, and the nāhiya 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 nāhiya, for the Eleventh Imam’s inheritance was divided between Ja’far ‘the Liar’ and the mother of al-ʿAskari.  

This physical dislocation of the nāhiya, and its removal to Baghdad, must have created an institutional dislocation, but we must nonetheless assume that the high-wakils 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-hammālīn), and other trappings of the wikala-network located at the house of one of the high-wakils, or some shared headquarters, as it had been at the house of the Imam. In addition, it is likely that the regional wakils themselves received some kind of remuneration that was both ritual and financially valuable, in return for their services, in additional to the financial benefit likely to have accrued from being the equivalent of bankers to the community. 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, Ḥidāya, 277.
115 See below, Chapter 4, and Modarressi, Crisis, 79.
influential men, their liberality in patronage is noted. We have clear indications that the Imams and the nāhiya of the early ghayba support believers in need of their patronage. Clearly patronage and sacral functions were closely allied.

In addition to such financial needs, more symbolic gifts were made to believers, which display a sacral ritual significance. In one particularly telling report, a man who is sent money and a gown (thawb) from the nāhiya 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 nāhiya’s attempts at continuation of the Imam’s traditional patronage role, and the assumption of an equal rank between believers, undermining the nāhiya’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 nāhiya – suggesting the impossibility of redirecting funds due to the Imam.

---

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 Shi’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-diggers\textsuperscript{122} that both indicate the ritual relationship between the \textit{nāhiya} and the believers, but also function in the sources as a miraculous legitimation of the \textit{nāhiya} through the evidence of miraculous knowledge of the time of a believer’s death.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{124} The very receipts from the \textit{nāhiya} 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 \textit{wikāla}-network in the \textit{ghayba} era is that of the definition of the boundaries of the community through mechanisms such disassociation or anathematization (\textit{barā’a}) and cursing (\textit{la’n}), through formally-issued \textit{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-\textit{ghayba} era.\textsuperscript{125} The \textit{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

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

\textsuperscript{123}Ibn Bābūya, \textit{Kamāl} 505.

\textsuperscript{124}See, for example the two dinars sent to al-Hulaysī, on Hajj, before he became sick, and the violets (\textit{banafsaj}) that are used to cure his sickness, Ibn Bābūya, \textit{Kamāl}, 493-4.

\textsuperscript{125}See, for example, the Chapter in \textit{Ṭūsī} on pre-Occultation miscreants, \textit{Ghayba}, 218-19; and Kashshī, \textit{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. 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 (*tawqīʿāt*) 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-\textit{wakīls} such as Ibn Mahziyār, to the provincial believer who wanted to know the true \textit{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 \textit{wikāla}-network were imbued with ritual importance for the purification of the individual, and the achievement of salvation.

The \textit{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 \textit{de facto} power exercised by the high-\textit{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-tanbih, 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. 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. 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’, 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 safīr 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, Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ in 281/894-5. When the institution of the wakīlate eventually emerged as the dominant authority structure within the newly constituted Imami-Twelver 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-ʿAskarī. 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 Imamis the most obvious Imam was not a hidden Child, born in secret, but the plainly visible Jaʿfar, 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-ʿAskarī, the Eleventh Imam, in 260/874, up until the death of al-Ḥasan’s brother, Jaʿfar ‘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, Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī, known as ‘the Liar’ to Twelver posterity. While being of the right lineage, Jaʿfar 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 ʿAlī al-Hādī. In order to stymie Jaʿfar’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. 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 Jaʿfar ‘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, Jaʿfar 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. Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, 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 ābāsid 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 Jaʿfar, rather than Jaʿfar 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/Khadija, 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, Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar’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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Hāḍī</td>
<td>The Tenth Imam (d.254-5/868-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad</td>
<td>Al-Hāḍī’s eldest son, designated as Imam but died (251-2/865-6) during his father’s lifetime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-ʿAskarī</td>
<td>Al-Hāḍī’s middle son, the Eleventh Imam (d. 260/874)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaʿfar b. ‘Alī ‘the Liar’</td>
<td>Al-Hāḍī’s youngest son, claimed to be the Imam after al-Ḥasan’s death (d. 281/894-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fāris b. Ḥātim b. Māhūya al-Qazwīnī</td>
<td><em>Wakīl</em> agent under al-Hāḍī. Turned renegade and was assassinated at al-Hāḍī’s orders. His followers supported the Imamate of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad, and later Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ (d. sometime between 250/ 864 and 255/869)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḫudayyith</td>
<td>The mother of the Eleventh Imam. Claimed to be legatee (<em>waṣī</em>) of the Eleventh Imam’s inheritance in opposition to Jaʿfar’s claim. Representative of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the spiritual legacy of the Eleventh Imam after his death. (d. between 262/876 and 281/895)

Ḥakīma a.k.a. Khādīja  The aunt of the Eleventh Imam, and supporter of Ḥudayth

Saqīl a.k.a. Narjis  A concubine of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. 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 ʿĪsā b. al-Mutawakkil  Brother of the Caliph al-Muʿtamd. Prayed over the corpse of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī

Supporting characters

ʿAlī b. al-Ṭāḥī al-Khazzāz  A Kufan Faṭḥite theologian and supporter of Jaʿfar in association with the sister of Fāris.

Ibn Nuṣayr (Abū Shuʿayb Muḥammad b. al-Namīrī)  Regarded by Nuṣayrīs to have been the ‘bāb’ or intermediary for the Tenth and Eleventh Imams (probably d. around 260/784)

ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, sometimes known as Ḥafṣ b. ʿAmr  The first Envoy

Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī.  The second Envoy, son of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd (d. 305/917)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role and Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allāh al-Jamāl</td>
<td>Vizier to the ‘Abbasid Caliph al-Muʿtamid, from 256/869-70 until he died in 263/877.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd ‘Allāh b. Yahyā b. Khāqān</td>
<td>Prominent Qummī associate of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. Member of a delegation to bring canonical taxes to Samarra which rejected Jaʿfar as the Imam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Ashʿarī al-Qummī</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. The Imam who might have been: Jaʿfar ‘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, Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī, rejected in favor of the absent Child Imam? The answer lies, in part, in the background to Jaʿfar’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, ʿAlī al-Hādī. Al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī had not been the original candidate for Eleventh Imam. The eldest son of the Tenth Imam was Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammadmad and he had been designated by al-Hādī, but had
then died during al-Hādī’s lifetime. Al-Hādī duly designated al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, 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, and for others merely presented a good opportunity to express their dissatisfaction. Some rejected al-Ḥasan in favor of his younger brother, Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’._10_ Among those who rejected al-Ḥasan, some believed that al-Hādī had designated Jaʿfar directly, and that his designation of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad was an instance of _taqiyya_ to protect Jaʿfar. Others believed that Jaʿfar inherited the Imamate not directly from his father, but by way of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad. Others continued to be attached to the idea of the Imamate of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad to the extent that they even claimed that he had gone into _ghayba_ and was the messianic _mahdī_. In order to repair the damage created by Jaʿfar’s claim to the Imamate, reports from the mouth of al-Hādī were circulated condemning Jaʿfar. During the lifetime of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, his _wakīls_ and other supporters must have engaged in a concerted propaganda effort to spread these reports and undermine Jaʿfar’s support. One of the influential men who had favored Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad during the Imamate of al-Hādī was the regional _wakil_ 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 Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq’s son and designated heir, Ismāʿīl, which had created great rifts in the community, ultimately furnishing the claims of the Ismaʿilis. See Nawbakhtī, _Firaq al-shīʿa_, edited by Hellmut Ritter (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-dawla li-jamʿiyat al-mustashriqin 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 ʿAlī b. Muḥammad [al-Hādī] declared for the Imamate of al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī and established the Imamate for him by means of the testament [wašīyya] of his father... except for a few, and they went towards his brother, Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī, and they said, “His father appointed him as successor (awsaʿ 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 [ittiqāʾan ʿalayhi] and protect him, but the Imam in reality was Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī.” Nawbakhtī, _Firaq_, 79.


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 Jaʿfar.

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-ʿAskarī following the death of al-Hādī declared for Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar Muḥammad, after which Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ claimed to be the bāb after Fāris.¹⁵ We cannot credit the idea that Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar’s followers, in their efforts to fit Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar. 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

¹⁴ See the quotation from Nawbakhtī in the note above. Khaṣībī reports the following: “And the Shi’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 Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī al-ʿAskarī.” 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 Jaʿfar Muḥammad, his followers then had to discover an appropriate mechanism to transfer spiritual authority to Jaʿfar. An alternative was the claim that a servant called Nafīs was the legatee of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad, and passed the Imamate on to Jaʿfar.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 Jaʿfar still prominent. After his death, the community was faced with the perplexing choice between the Imamate of Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar ‘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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’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.
Abū al-Adyān said: … I was with Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī [‘the Liar’] his brother, at the door of the house, and the Shiʿa were around him, offering their condolences and congratulating him (yuʿzawnahuwa yuhanniʾūnahu). 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.”

This account depicts a situation in which the majority of the Imamis seem to have accepted Jaʿfar as the next Imam. The narrator rejects Jaʿfar as a candidate on moral grounds. Many such reports stress the immorality of Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar presented the gravest problems for Jaʿfar’s candidacy.

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 Jaʿfar’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. The inevitability of some Imamis’ initial recognition of Jaʿfar as Imam 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 Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar might have been accepted by the majority of Imamis, Crisis, 81.
Jaʿfar, 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-ʿAskarī, pro-Jaʿfar groups feature strongly. The apparent fact that Jaʿfar was the only viable visible, living candidate for the Imamate\(^{23}\) must have been a persuasive factor for many of those followers of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī 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-ʿAskarī appear to have initially accepted the succession of Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar and Fāris. Al-ʿAmrī, for example, is reported to have been explicitly involved with the anathema against Fāris at the time of al-Hādī.\(^{25}\) For his part, whatever the beliefs of his followers, Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Nawbakhfī’s sects did claim that Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad was the Imam, and he had a son who was the qāʾīm, and the mahdī. Nawbakhfī, *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 Ḥājīz b. Yazīd al-Washshāʾ is portrayed in one report as siding initially with Jaʿfar against the Child Imam. Upon the sudden appearance of the Child Imam at the funeral of al-ʿAskarī Ḥājīz says to Jaʿfar, “Oh my Lord (sayyid) who is the boy so that we may set up proof against him (li-nuqīma al-hujjaʿalayhī).” 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Ḥājīz. See following chapter.

\(^{25}\) Kashshī, *Rījāl*, 373.

\(^{26}\) See below.
expect, the Nuṣayrī and Twelver accounts always portray those who claim the Imamate for Jaʿfar as mad and bad. And yet, one can discover certain useful details about the pro-Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar had succeeded to the Imamate, with three distinct positions being contested: that he had been designated Imam by his father, ʿAlī al-Ḥādī; or by his eldest brother Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad, or by al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. However, this was by no means unprecedented. When I describe the Imami community before the Occultation as intrinsically fissiparous, 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. Jaʿfar’s followers are best understood as a number of different constituencies that Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar were presumably principally located both in Iran; in the Jibāl, where Fāris had collected canonical taxes, but also in Iraq, especially in Kufa. Among the thirteen splinter groups named by Nawbakhtī as having resulted from the crisis of succession after the death of al-ʿAskarī, four of them were supporters of Jaʿfar, though two of these appear to have had near-identical theoretical positions.

The positions of Jaʿfar’s supporters can be summarized as follows:

---

27 See Chapter 2.
28 Khaṣībī carries a report in which two followers of Jaʿfar had to escape to Kufa to avoid the displeasure of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, where they stayed until that Imam died. Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 291. Modarressi, *Crisis*, 75.
Jaʿfar was Imam designated by al-Ḥasan (two distinct groups). Some believed that al-Ḥasan passed the Imamate on to Jaʿfar, and that any apparent bad blood between them was mere show. 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, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, when his son ʿAbd Allāh al-Afṭaḥ 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 ʿAbd Allāh al-Afṭaḥ from the canonical list of Imams, the Faṭḥite splinter group, which was particularly strong in Kufa, had continued to include ʿAbd Allāh al-Afṭaḥ within their line of Imams. Apart from the inclusion of ʿAbd Allāh al-Afṭaḥ, the Faṭḥites did in practice follow the same Imams as the rest of Imamis. 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 Jaʿfar was ʿAlī b. al-Ṭāḥī al-Khazzāz, a mutakallim, and he proselytized on Jaʿfar’s behalf. Nawbakhtī tells us that he was aided in this by the sister of al-Fāris b. Ḫātim 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 ʿAlī

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 Faṭḥites, calling them “the jurisprudents (fuqahāʾ) from amongst the [Faṭḥites]; a pious and worshipful people,” including ʿAbd Allāh b. Bukayr b. Aʿyun, and his associates.31

While in the realm of abstract theory, these two groups had a lot in common, both consisting of Faṭḥite supporters of Jaʿfar, 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 Faṭḥites’ (al-faṭḥīyya al-khuluṣ).33 Though Nawbakhtī does not go into details, it appears from reports about the Jaʿfarites cited by Khaṣībī that the followers of Fāris held unorthodox views about the structure of Imamate, for they believed that Jaʿfar was initially a bāb and then later became Imam.34

**Jaʿfar 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.

**Jaʿfar was Imam, designated by his brother Abū Jaʿfar 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-ʿAskarī, applying words like ‘liar’ (kādhīb) and ‘perverted’ (munḥarif) to him; *Rijāl*, 371-4.
34 See Khaṣībī, *Hidāya*, 291-2, for the claims about Jaʿfar 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, Ḫudayth made regarding her role as the transmitter of spiritual authority. See below.
Imam from Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad to Jaʿfar. Nawbakhtī mentions that this group claimed that al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī was an infidel (kāfir), while making ghulāt claims regarding Jaʿfar, claiming him to be the Qāʾīm, and preferring him to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Ultimately, Nafīs was taken one night and thrown into a pool in a house and drowned. 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 legatee. For example, as we have noted above, the sister of Fāris b. Ḥātim rejected al-Ḥasan’s Imamate, but nonetheless allied herself to the Faṭḥite ʿAlī b. al-Ṭāḥī al-Khazzāz.

4.3. Key manoeuvres after the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī

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. 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-Kāẓim. 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 ʿAqīd/Badr.
37 Nawbakhtī, Firaq, 88-9.
38 Kulaynī, Kāfī, 1:384-5.
The wāqifiyya used Mūsā’s death in prison as a means of attacking Mūsā’s successor, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, on the grounds that neither had he washed his father’s body, nor had he been present at his funeral procession. 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-ʿAskarī, 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.

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, Kāfī, 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 عليه السلام يوم جمعة، وكان في تلك الليلة قد كتب بيده كتاباً كثيرًا إلى المدينة، وذلك في شهر ربيع الأول لثمانون سنة ستين، ولم يحضر في ذلك الوقت إلا صقيل الجارية، وعقيد الخادم ومن علم الله عز وجل غيرهما، قال عقيد: فدعا بماء قد أغلي بالمصتكي فجئنا به إليه فقال: أبدى بالصلاة هينوني فجنتنا به وبسطنا في حجره المنديل فأخذ من صقيل الماء غسل وجهه وذيفانه مرة مرة ومسح على رأسه وقدميه مسحاً وصلي صلاة الصبح على فراشة وأخذ القدح ليشرب فإذا قد فرَّبَت القدح ويده ترتعد فأخذت صقيل القدح منه. ومضى من ساعته صلوات الله عليه ودفن في دادره بسر من رأى إلى جانب أبيه صلوتا الله عليهما

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Abbād said: Abū Muḥammad b. ‘Alī [al-ʿAskarī] 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 Rabīʿ al-awwal, 260. No one was present at that time except Ṣaqīl the Concubine (al-jāriya) and ‘Aqīd the Eunuch (al-khādīm) 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.
ʿAqīd 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 (hayyīʿūnī)!" 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 ʿAqīd, 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 ʿAqīd 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 ʿAqīd 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. ʿAqīd 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.
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-ʿAskarī 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-ʿAskarī died, it was not a close family member, but Abū ʿĪsā Ibn al-Mutawakkil, the brother of the reigning Caliph, al-Muʿtamid, who prayed over the corpse, perhaps after having washed it. Al-Khaṣībi’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 ʿAbbasid s:

 حدثني أحمد بن مطهر صاحب عبد الصمد بن موسى أنه كان بائتا عند عبد الصمد في الليلة التي توفى بها أبو محمد ( عليه السلام) فإنه دخل أحمد بن مطهر على عبد الصمد بن موسى ويقال إلى المعتمد وأخبره بوفاة أبي محمد ف أمر المعتمد أخاه بالركوب الوزير وعبد الصمد إلى دار أبي محمد حتى ينظروا إليه ويكشفوا عن وجه وبعده ويشلون عليه ويدفنتوه آثرا والوزير وعبد الصمد بعد الفضول فهربوا إليه بالخبر وتقدم إلى سائر الخاصة والعامة والذون إن يحضروا الصلاة عليه ففعل أبو عيسى والوزير وعبد الصمد جميع ما أمروا به ونظروا إلى من في الدار وانصرفوا إلى المعتمد فقال المعتمد لأخه أبو عيسى ابهر ابناك ستلي الخليفة لأن أخانا المعتز لما توفي أبو الحسن علي ابن محمد يخرجت وصليت وصلى بصلاتنا في الدار لأنه كان الكبير يصلى

Aḥmad b. Muṭahhar, the associate of ʿAbd al-Ṣamad b. Mūsā\(^{47}\) said that he had been staying the night with ʿAbd al-Ṣamad on the night in which Abū Muḥammad [al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī] died, and that Aḥmad b. Muṭahhar entered into the presence of ʿAbd al-Ṣamad b. Mūsā and informed him of the death of Abū Muḥammad [al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī]. Then ʿAbd al-Ṣamad rode to the Vizier [ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān] and informed him of this. The Vizier rode with ʿAbd al-Ṣamad b. Mūsā b. Baqāʾ to al-Muʿtamid [the Caliph], and they both informed him of the death of Abū Muḥammad. Al-Muʿtamid ordered his brother to ride with the Vizier and ʿAbd 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 (yanẓūrū man khullīfā), 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 ʿĪsā [b. al-Mutawakkil] and the Vizier and ʿAbd 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-Muʿtamid and al-Muʿtamid said to his brother, Abū ʿĪsā, “I prophesy good news (ubashshir) that you will succeed to the Caliphate, because when Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad [al-Hādī] died, I went out and prayed [over al-Hādī] together with [al-Muʿtazz] in [al-Hādī’s] house… And when we had buried Abū al-Ḥasan

\(^{47}\) This is perhaps the ʿAbbāsid and governor of Mecca, who was the leader of the pilgrimage in 243, 244 and 249. See Abū Jaʿfar 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, Ḥ amad: you prayed over Abū al-Ḥ aṣan [al-Ḥ aḍī] so you will be rewarded with the Caliphate for your prayers over him.” And you, Abū Ṣāḥib have prayed over [Abū Muḥammad al-’Askarī], and I hope that you will be rewarded with the Caliphate as I was.”

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.

The historicity of Abū Ṣāḥib b. al-Mutawakkil’s involvement seems clear, both because there appears to be no doctrinal-polemical reason for Imamis to have generated such a report and his involvement is corroborated in several independent versions. It is possible that the corpse might have been washed before Abū Ṣāḥib 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-Ḥ aṣan washed and prayed over his father’s corpse, see Kulaynī, Kāfī, 3: 313.
49 The text reads, in fact, Abū al-Ḥ aṣan, which must be a mistake, for the anecdote makes no sense unless this refers to al-Ḥ aḍī’s son, al-Ḥ aṣan. Thus instead of Abū al-Ḥ aṣan, we must read this as either Abū Muḥammad, or al-Ḥ aṣan.
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. 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 to 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 ʿAbbasid 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 Shiʿi community about who had succeeded the Imam. Among the Imami Shiʿa, the term wasī

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 ʿadāla to refer to the two ʿAmārs, 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 Shiʿi scholars who transmit the reports about it.\footnote{See also the example above of the Nafisiyya splinter group who favored Jaʿfar, and whose conception of succession placed great significance upon the physical transmission of certain objects between one Imam and another. Nawbakhtī, \textit{Firaq}, 88-9.} Jaʿfar was outmaneuvered twice in his attempts to secure the property of the Imam; once when he attempted to physically the secure 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 Jaʿfar in a dramatic attempt to secure the property of the deceased Imam:

Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Bazzāz and Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Masʿūd al-Furātī said that \footnote{See also the example above of the Nafisiyya splinter group who favored Jaʿfar, and whose conception of succession placed great significance upon the physical transmission of certain objects between one Imam and another. Nawbakhtī, \textit{Firaq}, 88-9.} … on the night of [the death of] Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī], Jaʿfar 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 (\textit{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
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-ʿAskarī, 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 waṣṭyya, including the transmission of physical items like swords, turbans and, of course, books, see Rubin, “Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi’ī Tradition,” JSAT, 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 Jaʿfar 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-ʿAskarī. 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 ʿalā jamīʿ i mā fī-hā) and seek his offspring…”61 What can we make of these contradictions regarding the sealing of property? Did Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’s designs? Certainly, if it was the authorities who placed seals on the property to thwart Jaʿfar, we might expect this detail to be removed from a narrative that presents the thwarting of Jaʿfar as the punishment of God. Whoever his antagonist, Jaʿfar 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 ʿAbbasid authority during the Samarra period, it is impossible to judge conclusively as to who might have been behind the move to hinder Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar are heavily influenced by later propaganda, it is plausible to see them as reflecting the fact that Jaʿfar 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 ʿAqid 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 ومطالبه 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’, aqāṣīṣ) too long to explain with his brother Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar, we can assume that Jaʿfar’s ‘slandering’ Ḥudayth to the Caliph may refer simply his attempt to seek arbitration in the case of the inheritance. Several other reports depict Jaʿfar seeking the arbitration of the Caliph.63 It

---

62 Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 473-4
63 In particular there are reports in which Jaʿfar appears to ask the Caliph’s arbitration in his favor over the matter of who should be Imam and receive tithes from the Shiʿi 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:

And upon that (ʿinda dhālik) Ṣaqīl claimed that she was pregnant, and she was carried to
the house of al-Muʿtamid. The women of Muʿtamid 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
ʿUbayd 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 Jaʿfar versus Ḥudayth, and
Ṣaqīl 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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:

قولول جعفر وضرب على رأسه أسفًا على ما خرج من الدار وانه بقي يأكل ما كان له ويبيع حتى ما بقي له قوت يوم وكان له في الدار أربعة وعشرون ولدا بنون وبنات وله أمهات وأولاد وحشم وخدم وغلمان فبلغ به الفقر إلى أن أمرت الجدة وهي جدة إلى محمد (عليه السلام) ان يجري عليه من مالها الدقيق واللحم والشعير والتبن لدوابه وكسوة لأولاده وأمهاتهم وحشمه وفلما 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

\textsuperscript{66} Kulaynī, Kāfī, 503-6.
\textsuperscript{67} See above.
is the grandmother to Muḥammad [the Twelfth Imam] (AS), 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).

This report is clearly very largely governed by the polemic attributing dirty motives to Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar is forced to accept charity from al-Ḥasan’s mother. The report appears to suggest that Jaʿfar’s failure to immediately establish his claim on the inheritance resulted in loss of social standing and complete dependence upon others. While this report is probably exaggerated, and perhaps fabricated, it might also contribute further evidence to suggest that Jaʿfar was the loser in the confrontation with Ḥudayth. While the inheritance was frozen or Jaʿfar 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, 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 (waṣiyya) – 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-Shiʿi (nāṣib) ‘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 Jaʿfar’s humiliating poverty below.

71 See the pilgrimage narrative from the ‘era of Ḥudayth,’ below.
bureaucrat who was stationed in Qumm, Aḥmad b. ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān, who passed the report down to Qummī traditionists on the authority of his father, ʿUbayd Allāh, an energetic political actor of the Samarra period and vizier to the Caliph al-Muʿtamid at the time of the death of al-ʿAskarī.\(^{72}\)

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 [ʿAskarī’s] mother and his brother Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar came to my father [the vizier] ʿUbayd 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 Shiʿa, 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-Muʿtamid, was from 256/869-70 until he died in 263/877, Matthew Gordon, “The Khāqānid Families of the Early ʿAbbasid 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 wasiyya legacy. The account flips suddenly from the concept of the physical inheritance of house and chattels, to that of the spiritual leadership of the Shiʿa. Jaʿfar is presented as being ridiculous in attempting to solicit political support from outside the Shiʿi community to help him fight his battles.  

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. 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 Jaʿfar’s disadvantage. Modarressi suggests that Jaʿfar’s reputation among the Imamis was sullied by his appeal to the hated Sunni authorities, 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 Jaʿfar entirely from the inheritance, 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,
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 Jaʿfar 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 ʿAbbasid 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.


which this dating is omitted, and by the fact that the usual waiting period for a woman whose consort had died was around three to four months. 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.” 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,” and the death of ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Khāqān suddenly crushed them; and their attention was distracted from her by their exit from Samarra and the matter of Ṣāḥib al-Zanj at Baṣra. 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. 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 Nawbakhfī and Sa’d b. ʿAbd 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,” Elr.
87 Samarra was formally abandoned as capital in 279/892, but the caliph Muʿtamid is not known to have visited it after 269/884, other than to be buried. See Alistair Northedge, “Samarra,” El2.
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,” El2.
89 See Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 473-4 and above.
90 See Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 476.
Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Qanbar the Elder, mawlā of [Imam] Riḍā (AS) said: The Lord of the Age (ṣāḥib al-zamān) came out to Jaʿfar ‘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 Jaʿfar! What is with you? Why do you intervene in the matter of my rights?" Jaʿfar was perplexed and astonished. Then he disappeared from him (ghāba ʿanhu). And after that Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar - is it your house?" Then he disappeared (ghāba ʿanhu), and he did not see him after that.

According to this report, then, Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’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.

Hudayth 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 Jaʿfar

4.4.1. Ḥudayth, mother of al-ʿAskarī: the first intermediary of the Imam?

When Jaʿfar 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 *waṣīyya* which had a venerable tradition in the imamological and prophetological thinking of the Imams.

There are a variety of reports amongst our sources that indicate that al-ʿAskarī’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

---

⁹³ Modarressi, *Crisis*, 78 n126.
⁹⁴ See the citation from Khasībī, *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 وِاء الحجاب وسألتها عن دينها فسمت لي من تأتم به ، ثم قالت : فلان بن الحسن عليه السلام فسمته ، فقلت لها : جعلني الله فداك معاينة أو خبرًا ؟ فقالت : خبرًا عن أبي محمد عليه السلام كتب به إلى أمه ، فقلت لها : فأين المولود ؟ فقالت : مستور ، فقلت : فإلى من تفزع الشيعة ؟ فقالت : إلى الجدة أم أبي محمد عليه السلام

Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm said: I went in to Ḥakīma, daughter of Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Riḍā the sister of Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, [i.e. al-Hādī, the Tenth Imam] in the year 262, in Medina, and I spoke to her from behind the curtain (ḥijāb) 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, (muʿāyinan) or as a written report (khabaran)?” And she said, “As a written report from Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] 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 tafzaʿ u al-shīʿa?)” She said, “The grandmother”, Abū Muḥammad’s mother.96

95 This echoes Q 5:3, and the circumstances of ʿAlī’s designation by Muḥammad at Ghadīr Khumm.
While al-ʿAskarī’s aunt, here, does not claim to be an eyewitness to the Child Imam, instead attributing her knowledge to written communication with the Eleventh Imam, she does state that al-ʿAskarī’s mother has a more direct active role. This suggests, then, that al-ʿAskarī’s mother was active at this early stage, two years after the death of al-ʿAskarī, making claims for the existence of the Child Imam, and positioning herself as his intermediary to whom the Shiʿa 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 عليه السلام إن الحسين بن علي عليه السلام أوصى إلى أخته زينب بنت علي بن أبي طالب عليه السلام في الظاهر ، وكان ما يخرج عن علي بن - الحسين من علم ينسب إلى 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 wasiyyatuhu ilā al-marʾa)?” She said “In imitation of al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (AS). Al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (AS) made out his legacy to his sister Zaynab bt. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (AS) to outward appearances (fī al-ẓāhir). The knowledge (ʿilm) that issued from ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn was attributed to Zaynab bt. ʿAlī in order to hide (tasatturan) ʿAlī 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?”

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, Kāfī, 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 ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, the Fourth Imam, which was seen as having been accomplished by a female intermediary legatee, or waṣī, Zaynab bt. ʿAlī, 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 Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ – the so-called ‘Nafisiyya’ who claimed that Jaʿfar’s eldest brother had passed on the Imamate, and the Imam’s possessions via the servant-boy legatee Nafis. See above, and Nawbakhti, *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 Jaʿfar’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 ومعي جماعة ، فوافينا العسكر
فكتب أصحابي يستأذنون في الزياِة من داخل باسم ِجل ِجل ، فقلت : لا تثبتوا اسمي فإني لا أستأذن فتركوا
اسمي فخرج الاذن " ادخلوا ومن أبى أن يستأذن "

Jaʿfar b. ʿAmr said: I went out to Samarra (al-ʿAskar) while Umm Abī Muḥammad [the mother of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī] was alive and there was a group with me, and we reached Samarra (al-ʿAskar) and my companions wrote to ask permission to do the pilgrimage on the inside (al-ziyāra min dākhil), 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, Jaʿfar b. ʿAmr, 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 عل 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 ʿUthmān.

Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Ḥasanī:… And [the Twelfth Imam’s] letters (kutub) and signs and rescripts (tawqīʿāt) were issued at the hands of Abū Shuʿayb 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. ʿUthmān.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 Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Saʿīd b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī.102 It is unlikely that Ḥudayth would have associated herself with this genealogy of

---

101 Khaṣṣībī, Ḥidāya, 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. ʿUthmān 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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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 Shiʿi 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 \textit{wakīls}/Envoys, who themselves appear in the genealogy after Ḥudayth, represented by the second Envoy, \textit{but not the first}.\textsuperscript{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 Shiʿa seek succor,” though the assertion that she was a \textit{bāb}-like figure issuing the Child

---

\textsuperscript{103} Friedman explains that the \textit{bāb} is the second emanation from the \textit{maʿnā}, 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 \textit{sīyāqa} (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 \textit{bāb}. Friedman \textit{Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs}, 15, 77, 79, 80.

\textsuperscript{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 Țūsī. 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 Twelver and Nuṣayrī traditions, 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 Jaʿfar 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, and certain physical items that were held to be passed down from one Imam to the next. 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-ʿAlawīs, 73-81) and the transmission of spiritual knowledge from the time of Ibn Nuṣayr to Khaṣibī (Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs, 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 Khaṣibī’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 Shiʿi conception of wasiyya, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{109} Interestingly, Jaʿfar is also depicted in one report as having a female bāb. See Khaṣībī, Hidāya, 293-4 and below.
\textsuperscript{110} See the discussion of the ṬAmrīs in the following chapters.
\textsuperscript{111} We will deal with the rise of the wakīls in the following chapter.
Ḥudayth was still alive in 262/876.\textsuperscript{112} Modarressi places death of Jaʿfar at 281/894-5\textsuperscript{113} so that would give us a \textit{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 is a certain window within which these events were taking place, and the initial legacy of the \textit{ghayba} era was determined, before Ḥudayth’s incipient mediation was replaced by the \textit{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 \textit{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-ʿAskarī as being the ‘Era of Ḥudayth,’ or the ‘Era of the Grandmother.’

\textbf{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, Ḥakīma\textsuperscript{114} (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,\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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. Mahdī al-Jawḥarī goes to visit the al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī in the year 255/868-9 and asks him to name the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} See above.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Modarressi, \textit{Crisis}, 83.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Ṭūsī transmits that Hakīma was the daughter of the Ninth Imam, Muḥammad al-Jawād, and therefore the sister of the Tenth Imam, Ṭūsī, \textit{Ghayba}, 145.
\item \textsuperscript{115} See Ṭūsī, \textit{Ghayba}, 145-7.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Khaṣībī, \textit{Hidāya}, 264.
\end{itemize}
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.”

In this report, then, a clear association is drawn between the identity of the mother of the Twelfth Imam, and the role of al-ʿAskarī’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.

It is worth noting that Ḥakīma/Khadīja is associated both with the Imam’s household in Samarra as well as Medina, as seen above. Perhaps this is not unsurprising, for though, as a daughter of ʿAlī 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 ʿAlids 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 ʿAbbasid authorities. This mobility might have represented a political advantage following the death of al-ʿAskarī.

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 Khaṣṣībī, Hidāya, 249.
118 Khaṣṣībī, 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-ʿAskarī. 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 report\textsuperscript{120} 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.

\textbf{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{121} See above.
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 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 Ṣaqīl 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. 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 Ṣaqīl 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 Shiʿi 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. In another report, the surveillance is conducted while the concubine was living in the care of an ʿAlid for some years, and yet another report suggests that she died around the turn of the century. 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 ʿAqīd/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-ʿAskarī washed his body in preparation for death with the assistance of ṬAQīd 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, ṬAQīd 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 ṬAQīd 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 Ḥājīz 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 Naṣīm).

\(^{132}\) Kulaynī, Kāfī, 1:519-20.
fulfilling an identical function in the narratives is named Badr. 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 ʿĪsā b. Mahdī al-Jawharī al-Junbulānī goes on Hajj 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. 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 الشعيباني وكتبت ِقعة إلى السيدة نرجس ( عليها السلام ) أعرفها بقدومي لزياِة مولاي ( عليه السلام ) وانفذتها مع بدِ الخادم المعروف بابي الحر فانصرفت... فجئت إلى بدِ فعرفته علي بن أحمد ومذهبه واعملته انه يريد يكتب رقعة واني أردت ان استأذن له فقال لي : تعود إلى 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 وددعت إليه رقعة فدعا له فيها ودفع إليه ستة ناهم وقيل له رصع منها الخواتم.

Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Qummī said: I went out to Samarra with Ibn Aḥmad al-Shuʿaybānī [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 milieux, perhaps after a more or less decisive Nuṣayrī split off from the other Twelvers.

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 ʿAlī 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 ʿAlī b. Aḥmad said, “Write about what you want.” So I wrote a note asking for a prayer of petition (duʿāʾ) 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 [ʿAlī b. Aḥmad], and he was told, “Adorn some rings with them.”

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 ʿAlī 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.

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:

ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī said that he travelled to Samarra (al-ʿaskar) 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-ʿAskāri] and The Eunuch (al-khādim) came out to him and said to him, "what is your name?" He said, "My name is ʿAlī 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 ʿAqīd, 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 ʿAlī b. Aḥmad in this report with the ʿAlī 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 Khaṣṣībī, Hidāya, 290.
137 We will deal more below with the role of the dispersed Shiʿi 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

Solid lines represent the primary line of transmission of spiritual authority. Dotted lines represent relationships that do not appear to be the primary source of spiritual status for these figures.

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-Ṣaqīl 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/Ṣaqīl is herself the intermediary to her son, the Imam, supported by a servant ʿAqīd/Badr, or sometimes ʿAqīd/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-Jaʿfar, and may have benefited from some support from the authorities against Jaʿfar. 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 ʿAbbasid

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-ʿAskārī, 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-ʿAskārī, 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.\footnote{Most of these early alignments have been lost, though the ambiguities in the careers of Ḥājiz (who appears to support Jaʿfar “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.} 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 Jaʿfar or someone else, they would say, “We do not know,” but rather reserve judgement, “until the matter is clear for us.”\footnote{See Nawbakhtī, 89-90, also quoted in full below.}

Increasingly, however, it became clear that Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar organized itself, it became less tenable to stand on the fence about whether or not Jaʿfar was the Imam. Starting from the first hours after the Eleventh Imam’s death, and growing over the next few years, the opposition to Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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.”\footnote{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-ʿAskarī, born and living in hiding. See Modarressi, \textit{Crisis}, 125.} 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
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.”  

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 Būṇya, 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 Shiʿism 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 Shiʿism. For example the narrative of the conversion of the Ismaili dāʿī from Kufa, Ibn Ḥawshab in Iftitāḥ al-daʿwa43 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. Jaʿfar’s troubles

4.6.1. The difficulty of creating a viable network

While Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’s followers beyond the fourth/tenth century, we can investigate some of the internal difficulties that Jaʿfar faced in his attempt to create a viable movement in support of his Imamate. As we have seen, Jaʿfar’s followers subscribed to a variety of beliefs, from the

---

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 wakil 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-‘Askari, 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, Jaʿfar publically stated that he was the \textit{waṣī} of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī,\textsuperscript{146} thereby potentially alienating the original core of his support base, who traced their allegiance to Jaʿfar through the supporters of Fāris who were hostile to al-Ḥasan. Further instances of the unorthodoxy of those who supported Jaʿfar in the tradition of Fāris is provided by a report in the \textit{Hidāya} that relates a debate between Khaṣībī himself and Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Thawāba and Abū ʿAbd Allāh Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Jamāl in Ibn Thawāba’s house in Baghdād on the eastern side of ʿAskar al-Mahdī. In this meeting Thawāba and al-Jamāl claimed that Jaʿfar was designated through the following unorthodox chain of succession: al-Hādī designated his son Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad as his successor; Fāris b. Ḥātim claimed that he was the \textit{bāb} of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad; and Jaʿfar claimed that he was the \textit{bāb} of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad after Fāris b. Ḥātim. In contrast to other reports in the \textit{Hidāya}, the followers of Jaʿfar appear as sincere \textit{mutakallims} standing up for their own theology. It also suggests that they belong to a similar \textit{ghulāt} cosmological tradition as Khaṣībī himself, in the prominence they give to the \textit{bābs} of the Imams. In particular, the suggestion that Jaʿfar was, at first a \textit{bāb}, but was transformed into an Imam later is very unusual, recalling the concept of \textit{siṭāqa} of the Nuṣayrī tradition, in which the spiritual essence of one historical figure is believed to have been transferred into another historical figure.\textsuperscript{147} In his debate with these followers of Jaʿfar, 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

\textsuperscript{146} I saw ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Faḍḍāl, and he said, “I wrote to Jaʿfar and I asked him about Abū Muḥammad – who his successor (\textit{waṣī}) is, and he said, “Abū Muḥammad was an Imam to whom obedience was due for the people, and I am his successor (\textit{waṣī}).”” Khaṣībī, \textit{Hidāya}, 289.

\textsuperscript{147} Friedman, \textit{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-Ṣāʾigh al-Balkhī which adds key details to our picture of the followers of Jaʿfar – 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 ʿAbd Allāh al-Jamāl and Abū ʿAlī al-Ṣāʾigh. The transmitter of this report, Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh 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-ʿAskarī. In Samarra he observes the movements of Jaʿfar 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) who was acting as the intermediary – the bāb – of Jaʿfar. This woman transmits letters to and from Jaʿfar, and arranges a meeting with him for Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh. Another intermediary working on behalf of Jaʿfar is a certain Abū Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb b. Abī Nāfiʿ al-Madāʾinī. In order to test Jaʿfar’s claim, Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh sends letters under an assumed name via each of these intermediaries, and manages to gain an audience with Jaʿfar. Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh 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-ʿAskarī] 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 Shiʿi

---

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*. 

254
colleagues riven with dissent, and then in Iraq, where he found people similarly divided. In Baghdad he came across supporters of the claim of Jaʿfar, “Abū al-Ḥasan b. Thawāba and his associates (aṣḥāb) and Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Jamāl (al-Jammāl?) and Abū ʿAlī al-Ṣāʾigh and others.” When he eventually came face-to-face with Jaʿfar, Ibn Ṣāʾigh told him that Abū al-Ḥasan b. Thawāba and Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Jamāl and Abū ʿAlī al-Ṣāʾigh claimed that Jaʿfar was the waṣī of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Ṭāhū. Jaʿfar responds to Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh’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 يقولون وها هنا من هو أشد من ابن ثوابة!؟” And I said, “Who? May I be your sacrifice!” He said, “Al-Qazwīnī Ṭāhī b. Ṭāhī.” 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: Ṭāhī b. Ṭāhī 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-Ṣāʾigh mentions that they claimed that Jaʿfar was the waṣī of Abū Muḥammad, but given the context, this must be a mistake, and we should read instead Abū Jaʿfar Muhammad

150 Khaṣībī, Ḥidāya, 296.
Still Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh requires further clarification, and gets Jaʿfar to say clearly that he is the waṣī of Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAskarī, not of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad, and that he is the Imam after him. Then Ibn al-Ṣāʾigh 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


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 (badāʾ)?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Verily, God changed his mind (badā lahu) in that [i.e. He changed his mind about Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad being the Imam, in favor of Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAskarī’s Imamate]."¹⁵¹

This long story about the supporters of Jaʿfar 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-Ṣāʾigh and ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Qazwīnī, as being insincere, obstinate in their evil, stealing money in the name of Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfarites with al-ʿFāris b. Ḥātim b. Māhūya al-Qazwīnī, and the insistence upon Jaʿfar’s waṣiyya, not from al-ʿAskarī but from Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad is illuminating. It suggests that Jaʿfar 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 Khāṣibī, 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 Ṭālibīds. 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, 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 Jaʿfar’s supporters was not just a question of doctrinal legitimacy; it also had financial implications. Jaʿfar’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 ʿAbd 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.\textsuperscript{153} These accusations of embezzlement are clearly meant to undermine the claim of Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar is depicted as being destitute when he is unable to gain the inheritance of al-Ḥasan.\textsuperscript{154} The continued suggestions that Jaʿfar 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, Jaʿfar’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:

\begin{quote}
فقال: له عشرون ولدا وأربع عشرة بنداً وعليه من العيال ستين نفساً من الجوار والخدم والبنين والبنات وغيرهم،
وهو اليوم يأكل بالربا وقد له ثيابه وقدم ابن بشر وحمل عطايا الهاشميين والطاليبي.
\end{quote}

[Abū Sulaymān] said: [Jaʿfar] 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

\textsuperscript{153} For references to the Iraqi, and in particular, the Kufan and Basran milieu of some of the early Nuṣayrīs, see Friedman, \textit{Nuṣayrī-ʿAływīs}, 9, 17, 20; Friedman, “Ebn Noṣayr,” \textit{EIr}; Heinz Halm, “Ḡolāt,” \textit{EIr}.

\textsuperscript{154} See Khaṣībī, \textit{Hidāya}, 288-9, and above.
his clothes and Ibn Bashshār came and carried the alms of the Hāshimites and the Ṭālibids [to him].

In the same report, Jaʿfar 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.” Though this is clearly the result of anti-Jaʿfar 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. Reports of the appearance of the Imams – particularly the Twelfth Imam – often emphasized the glowing richness of his clothes and accoutrements, and a staff of suitably attired servants and chamberlains often appear in the important function of intermediaries for the Imam. 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 Jaʿfar’s name suggest Jaʿfar’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 Khaṣṣībī, Hidāya, 297.
156 Khaṣṣībī, Hidāya, 297.
157 See Rubin, “Prophets and Progenitors,” 43.
158 See, for example, Kulaynī, Kāfī, 1: 332; Hidāya, 268-9.
159 See for example, Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 476-9
Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar’s clear denunciation of those who claimed that his legitimacy rested on *waṣiyya* from Abū Jaʿfar 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-ʿAskarī, 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 Jaʿfarites 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 Imams\(^ {161}\) over the Jaʿfarites. He presents the beliefs and arguments of the Jaʿfarites Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Thawāba and Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ahmad b. ʿAbd 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 Jaʿfarites progresses to a moment when the Jaʿfarites are converted. At first they appear sincere in their support of Jaʿfar, though out-maneuvered by Khaṣībīʾs arguments. Then Khaṣībī cites clear hadith that clearly indicated that Jaʿfar was not the Imam, and the Jaʿfarites were unable to respond to him: “They were silent, and I said to them both, “If you have something about your Master (ṣāḥib) like what you have transmitted about Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskařiʾs Imamate] then cite it!” But they did not have anything, and thus they were refuted.”

Khaṣībī cites further hadith regarding the miraculous nature of al-Ḥasan, and finally the Jaʿfarites 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. From this account, it appears that the Jaʿfarites are defeated due to their lack of hadith-based epistemological power to counter the amassed data of the Twelvers. Khaṣībīʾs debate with the Jaʿfarites 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 century death date is variously given as 346/957 or 358/969. This would suggest that Khaṣībīʾs debates with the Jaʿfarites must have taken place some time after the death of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ towards the end of the third/ninth century or in the first half of the fourth/tenth century. Modarressi has carefully tracked the fate of Jaʿfarʾs followers who turned to his son Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī and his descendants after his death, some of whom appear to have managed to convert their spiritual authority into the leadership of Sufi orders. However,
significant levels of allegiance to Jaʿfar clearly declined rapidly from the mid-fourth/tenth century onwards. Though Khaṣībī appears to have seen the Jaʿfarites as significant enough problem to include his debates with them in the *Hidāya*, by 373/983-984, Mufīd states that he did not know anyone who believed in Jaʿfar as the Imam.\textsuperscript{169}

From Khaṣībī’s biased testimony regarding the pro-Jaʿfar movement, then, two large areas of problematic emerge that seem to have contributed to Jaʿfar’s downfall. The first is that Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfarite scholars – perhaps because they were increasingly in the minority, and perhaps also because the communities who ultimately backed Jaʿfar 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.

\textbf{4.6.2. Jaʿfar, the test of knowledge, and the Qummi alliance}

Jaʿfar’s moniker, ‘the Liar’ (*kadhdḥāb*) 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 Jaʿfar as unable to pass an examination of his knowledge set for him by Qummi scholars.

\textsuperscript{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 topos 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 هواي في جعفر وكتبت اسمع بالامام المهدي مقيم بالعسكر وان قوما شاهدوه ويخرج إليهم أمره ونهيه وكتبته إلى جعفر أسأله عن الامام والوصي من بعد

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Madāʾinī said… my whimsy (hawāya) had been fixed on Ja’far when I heard about *al-Imām al-Mahdī* living at Samarra (*al-ʿAskar*) 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 الصادق 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 أبائك ( عليهم السلام ) فأجابوا عنها بأجوبة وهي عندنا نقتدي بها وتعمل عليها فأجبنوا عنها مثل ما أجاب آباؤك المتقدمون ( عليه السلام ) حتى نحمل

‘Abbās b. Ḥaywān and Abū ‘Alī al-Ṣāʾigh said that Jaʿfar wrote to Aḥmad b. Ḥisāq al-Qummī demanding from him [the canonical taxes] that he had been carrying from Qumm to Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī], and more than that. And the people of Qumm gathered with Aḥmad b. Ḥisāq and they wrote him a letter of response to [Jaʿfar’s] letter including in it questions which they asked him and they said, "Answer these [legal] questions (masāʾil), 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. Ḥisāq) went out until he got to Samarra (al-ʿAskar) and delivered to [Jaʿfar] the letter and he stayed there regarding that matter for a while, asking about the answer to the [legal] questions, but Jaʿfar did not answer them, nor the letter at all, ever.  

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 Jaʿfar is expected to manifest miraculous knowledge about the nature and amounts of the canonical taxes brought from

171 Khaṣḥībī, Hidāya, 289-90
Qumm. Instead, in this report, Jaʿfar is stymied not by any miraculous \textit{deus ex machina}, but by simple questions of (presumably) legal knowledge. Jaʿfar – 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-ʿAskarī himself had been accused of being insufficiently knowledgeable to succeed to the Imamate, 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 Jaʿfar’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. Isḥāq, a Qummī, and member of the elite Ashʿarī clan whose power was pre-eminent in Qumm, 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 \textit{wakīls} and the epistemological authority of Qummī traditionists. In the Twelver tradition present in Ibn Bābūya’s \textit{Kamāl}, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq al-Qummī’s role in examining and rejecting Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ is played by another Qummī, perhaps a member of the same delegation, Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī. This account is augmented by the explicit suggestion that the \textit{wakīls} will serve as intermediaries for the Twelfth Imam in the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{172} Ibn Bābūya, \textit{Kamāl}, 475-6; 476-9.
\bibitem{173} Modarressi, \textit{Crisis}, 66, n54.
\end{thebibliography}
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. We will discuss this narration further in the following chapter, in the context of the emergence of a successful alternative to the Imamate of Jaʿfar: 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.’

\[\text{175 Ibn Bābūya, } \textit{Kamāl}, \text{ 476-9.}\]

Chapter 5: The wakīls of the nāḥiya during the Era of Perplexity

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 Jaʿfar 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,’ ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, who, however, is not depicted in any narrative source playing a substantial role in the early Occultation era. The activities of shadowy figures like Ḥājiz and his ‘successor’ al-Asadī, and Aḥmad b. Isḥāq 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-Kulaynī and al-Katib al-Nuʿmani,” 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, Shiʿism, 34. While the emotional perception of perplexity persisted at least until the time of Nuʿmān, we may say that the height of this perplexity was the period before the rise of Abū Jaʿfar 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*.

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‘i 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 Jaʿfar 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 though 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 has 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-Kāẓim and al-Hādī whose respective imprisonment and house arrest cut them off from large-scale communication with their followers. 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. 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. 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
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 ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī, whose book lists in the rijāl literature indicates his interest in the Occultation, and his alliance with Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, 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 Safīrate 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. Isḥāq 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-ʿAskarī 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* and Ibn Qiba’s works transmitted by Ibn Bābūya 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-ʿAskarī, as the problems with the potential Imamate of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ emerged, and the maneuverings surrounding al-ʿAskarī’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*. 

272
of doctrinal speculations was generated, some of which might have been associated with a particular party or group within the Shiʿi 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-ʿAskarī. 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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’. As we have seen, Jaʿfar was served by wakīls who attempted to collect money in his name, some of whom abandoned Jaʿfar and embezzled the money. It is likely that those who were wakīls for al-ʿAskarī 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 Jaʿfar, 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’ (*firqa*) by the heresiographers. The “I-don’t-know-ites” or *lā-adriyya* is a depicted by Nawbakhtī as distinct theological doctrine:

وقالت الفرقة الحادي عشر منهم لما سئلوا عن ذلك وقيل لهم ما تقولون في الإمام أهو جعفر أم غيره؟ قالو لا ندري ما نقول في ذلك أهو من ولد الحسن أم من إخوته فقد اشتبه علينا الأمر. إن نقول إن الحسن بن علي كان آليماً وقد توفى وإن الأرض لا تخلو من حجة ونتوقف ولا نقدم على شيء حتى يصح لنا الأمر ويتبين.

The eleventh faction of [the Imamis after the death of al-ʿAskarī], when they were asked about that, and it was said to them, “What do you say about the Imam? – Is he Jaʿfar [‘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 ʿalaynā al-amr*). We only say that al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī was an Imam, and he died, and that the world is never empty of a Proof (*ḥujja*), and we hesitate and we will venture upon a particular course (*lā nudism ʿalā shay′*) until the matter has been proven to us and made manifest.”

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 Shiʿism: 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 qaṭʿiyya: the party of certainty, referring to the certainty that al-ʿAskarī 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.
which would have radically changed the nature of belief, and lead to the destructuring/denaturing of the Imami community.

Because al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī had quarreled with his brother Jaʿfar, many of those wakīls and community members who had served and had been supporters of al-Ḥasan were lead to reject Jaʿfar. The implication of the lā-buddiyya idea, as defended by Ibn Qiba, was that it excluded the possibility of the Imamate of Jaʿfar, but instead of suggesting a living, visible alternative, it had recourse to theological reasoning: a doctrine replaced a physical candidate for Imamate.\textsuperscript{14} On the basis of the idea that there had to be an Imam somewhere, the Imami elite opposed to Jaʿfar 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 ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn:

\begin{quote}
قال ( عليه السلام ) : ولم تخل الأِض منذ خلق الله آدم من حجة لِلّ فيها ، ظاهر مشهوِ ، أو غائب مستوِ ، ولا تخلو إلى أن تقوم الساعة من حجة لِلّ فيها ، ولولا ذلك لم يعبد الله . قال سليمان : فقلت للصادق ( عليه السلام ) : فكيف ينتفع الناس بالحجة الَائب المستوِ ؟ قال : كما ينفعون بالشمس إذا سترها السحاب.
\end{quote}

[Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn] 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 (ghāʾib 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.”

\textsuperscript{14} In one tract by Ibn Qiba extant in Ibn Bābūya’s Kamāl, a pro-Jaʿfar disputant derisively used the term lā-buddiyya to argue that it was absurd that the Twelvers rejected a visible, present candidate, Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar ‘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-Ṣādiq [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-‘Amarī, and perhaps had been employed earlier by the wāqifā on behalf of their Hidden Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim.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‘iliyya,” EI2; “Ḥamdān Ḥarmaṭ,” EI2; and “Carmatians,” Elr.
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-ʿAskarī for the Child Imam, and the claims that a servant like Badr the Eunuch or ʿAqīd 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, 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 Jaʿfar and agreed upon the existence of a Child of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī 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-ʿAskarī who was the Imam.

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 ʿAskarī’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 Qāʾim. 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-ʿAskarī 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 Shiʿi ideas during the era of perplexity.
Figure 3: The doctrinal milieu of the early Occultation-faction

BEYOND THE PALE OF THE OCCULTATION FACTION:

- Those who accepted Imamate of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ (many faṭḥites)
- Ismailis: Imam from line of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl
- Those who accepted possibility of intermission between Imams (fatra)
- Those who accepted non-Faṭimid lineage of Imams (Zaydīs)
- Those who believed that there is no longer an Imam

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 Faṭḥite and ghulāt follower of Jaʿfar, 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’s Kitāb al-tanbīh, written around 290/903. Klemm claims that in this text, “there is no mention at all of a continuously functioning sifāra.” 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 ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥīmyarī 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, 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,

---

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.
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 (*ṣulṭān*) 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-tanbīḥ* (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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, as well as actors such as Ḥājiz who appear in early reports representing the Hidden Imam and issuing letters and rescripts in his name.

Abū Sahl’s account of the Occultation-era intermediaries raises grave questions for our understanding of the career of Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and Abū Jaʿfar were both the Eleventh Imam’s trusted associates (thiqa), must have been redacted to anachronistically include Abū Jaʿfar amongst his retainers. On the other hand, if we were to reject Abū Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar’s death is more likely to be accurate. We do not, for example, possess the death date of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 Jaʿfar 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 *Kāfī*, 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 *wakil* of the *nāḥiya*, before the office of Envoy was established by Abū Jaʿfar.\(^{27}\) 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, this is not supported by the early narrative reports, for he does not appear in any narrative reports as operating as a *wakil* after the death of the Eleventh Imam.\(^{28}\) ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 عليهم السلام وأحد ثقاته أن السبب بينه وبين ابن الحسن بن علي عليهم 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 الأمر.

\(^{27}\) While the term *nāḥiya* does persist into the period of the Envoys, Abū Jaʿfar and Ibn Rawḥ, it often used in place of any name, suggesting that it was used in a period of inclarity 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. ʿAlī (AS) – one of his trusted associates (thiqāt) – mentioned that the connection (sabab) between himself and the son of al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (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 rajulīn min al-shī’a, mastūr, fa-qāma maqāmahū fī hādhā al-amr). 29

Given that there was a designation of succession (awṣā, waṣiyya) 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,” 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 thīqa hadith in Kulaynī, it must be emphasized that, for example in Kashshī’s Rijāl, the word thīqa is often used to describe various trustworthy followers of the Imam, and our sources mention various other trustworthy associates of the Eleventh Imam who were instrumental in the early-Occlluation era, especially Aḥmad b. Isḥāq 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, 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, 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, perhaps suggesting that the failure both of Ja’far’s bid for Imamate, and in the rupture in the mediatory structures of the early nāhiya 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī probably occurred as a result of the rise of the real authority of his son, Abū Ja’far al-ʿAmrī, following the rupture. However, in the reports from the earliest era, a number of figures distinct from either of the ʿAmrīs emerge as important elite actors as representing the nāhiya. In contrast, neither of the ʿAmrīs appears to be associated with the earliest phase of

---

35 The partisans of the pregnancy argued that the reports regarding that this pregnancy were uncontroversible due to their wide circulation, being, “well-attested and widespread (qāʾim, 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-ʿAskarī’s 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 *wakīl*. In this earliest phase, the *nāhiya* 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 Shiʿa, and can be seen in the lengths which ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd had seen the Child Imam.

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 *nāhiya*, *al-gharīm*, and so on, which might refer to the Imam himself, or metonymically, to his establishment in general. In this

---

38 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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-Shīʿī 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-ʿAskarī. 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 Jaʿfar ‘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. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī.

⁴¹ See above, Chapter 3.
5.7 Aḥmad b. Ishāq and the Qummī delegation

The delegation to test the knowledge of Jaʿfar ‘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 Shiʿa 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 Iraqi 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. Saʿīd as the reliable, trusted servant of the Eleventh Imam and personal eyewitness to the Child Imam. Aḥmad b. Ishāq also appears as one of the figures associated with this testing of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’’s claim to Imamate. This testing of Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’, and thereafter denying him the money of the Qummīs. This kind of test of knowledge may have been a crucial step in proving Jaʿfar as unsuitable for the Imamate. The test of knowledge is also reported in the case of earlier Imams, 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 Shiʿi 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 Ṣūsī and Najāshī, perhaps on the basis of this report. He appears in the *Ṭārīkh 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 Jaʿfar 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 Khaṣibī’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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar.\(^{48}\) In addition to the

\(^{45}\) Hussain, *Occultation*, 93.
single report in the *Hidāya* in which Aḥmad b. Ishāq is depicted as questioning the knowledge of Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’. All the delegation reports tend to take place soon after the death of al-ʿAskarī, suggesting that Aḥmad b. Ishāq, too, probably died soon after al-ʿAskarī. In the third report about the Qummīs and the testing of Jaʿfar, instead of Aḥmad b. Ishāq, Ibn Bābūya’s report replaces him with another Qummī, whose family is familiar to us: Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī. This is perhaps the brother of ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar 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. Jaʿfar 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-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī plays the central role in investigating and rejecting Jaʿfar. 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

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-Occlusion and early-Occlusion figure.
⁵¹ It is also possible that the same person is intended, and the name has been corrupted. Both have the *kunya* Abū al-ʿAbbās.
‘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 Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī, is instrumental in the inquisition of Jaʿfar:

Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Sinān al-Mawṣilī said, my father told me: When our Lord (sayyid) Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-ʿAskarī (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-ʿAskarī’s] brother, Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī.”

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-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar 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 Shiʿa with us, and others, and we were transporting monies to our Lord, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī [al-ʿAskarī]”… \(^{53}\)

Jaʿfar orders the delegates to hand the money over to him, and the delegates respond by telling him how al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī used to demonstrate his Imamic prerogative to collect the canonical taxes by predicting how much money was in each sack, and from whom. However, Jaʿfar accuses them of lying, saying that this would suggest that his brother had made an impossible claim to knowledge of the unseen (ʿilm 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,

إنا قوم مستأجرون وكلاه لأرباب هذه الأموال وهي وداعة لجماعة وأمرونا بأن لا نسلمها إلا بعلامة ودلالة ، وقد جرت بهذه العادة مع أبي محمد الحسن بن علي عليه السلام

“We are hired people the agents of the owners of this money (wukalāʾ 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. ʿAlī [al-ʿAskarī] (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 (ʿilm 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 escort 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-’Askari’s house and see the Twelfth Imam:

We entered the house of our Master (mawlānā) al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (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 (tawqīʿāt) would issue. They said: “So we went away from him and he gave to Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar 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 Ṭālibīds.
Qummī al-Ḥimyarī some of the balm (ḥunūṭ) 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-ʿAbbās reach ʿAqabat 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 (tawqīʿāt) issued. 57

This nuwwāb hadith has clear polemical aims: to show that Jaʿfar 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

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-ʿAskarī, 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. 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 ʿAmrīs, 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 (*nāʾib*, pl. *nuwwāb*) is also significant in the history of Shiʿi 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,\textsuperscript{59} then does this create problems for the historicity of the Qummī role in rejecting Jaʿfar? 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 Jaʿfar. 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 \textit{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. Ishāq 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 \textit{nāḥiya} as it was initially euphemistically known. Whatever the precise mechanisms for defeating Jaʿfar and establishing the authority of the \textit{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

\textsuperscript{59} In which case, this would place the hadith to around the time of his father, ʿAlī 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-ʿAskarī 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-ʿAskarī’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 thiqā hadith as the key figure in curating information about the Hidden Imam. In that hadith, he is seen to orchestrate ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar’s interaction with ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, producing the eyewitness account about the Child Imam. In the Qummī delegation report, Aḥmad b. Ishāq engineers the rejection of Jaʿfar 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:

Aḥmad b. Ishāq b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Mālik b. al-Ḥwaṣ al-Ashʿarī Abū ʿAlī al-Qummī. He was the delegate (wāfid) of the Qummīs. He transmitted from Abū Jaʿfar the Second [al-Jawād] and Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī] (AS), and he was the special retainer
(khaṣṣa) of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] (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.”

We can glean a number of important facts from this short biography. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq was a member of the prominent and well-connected Ashʿarī 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 Jaʿfar, in spite of one, clearly anachronistic report, which claims that he sent a request to go on Hajj to the Envoy, Ibn Rawḥ.62 In addition, his works give no indication that he survived into the era of Abū Jaʿfar. 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 Shiʿa, 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. Isḥāq 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 Ashʿarī family.
62 Kashshī, Rijāl, 394.
63 Ṭūsī, Rijāl, 397.
64 See Ibn Rustum, Dalāʾil, 503, and further discussion of the role of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq 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, 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-ʿAskarī, 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. While this account is miraculous and hagiographical, 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 Dalāʾil 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 Dalāʾil al-imāma, we would expect to find mention of the Imam’s major spokesperson, bāb, (or bawwāb as Ibn Rustum idiosyncratically puts it). 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 (ِضي الله عنه ) الشيخ الصدوق ، وكيل أبي محمد ( عليه السلام ) ، فلما مضى أبو محمد ( عليه السلام ) إلى كرامة الله ( عز وجل ) أقام على وكالته مع مولاه صاحب الزمان ( صلوات

65 Ibn Rustum, Dalāʾil, 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. Jaʿfar al-Qumnī 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 amending 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-Fārīṣī for ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib are included in Ibn Rustum’s mentioned ‘bawwāb’. 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.
And Aḥmad b. Iṣḥāq al-Qummī al-Ashʿarī (RAA), the truth-telling Shaykh was the wakīl of Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAskarī (AS), and when Abū Muḥammad (AS) passed to the bounty (karāma) of God (AJ), he continued in his wakīl-ship (aqāma ʿalā wikālatihi) with our Master (mawlā) the Lord of the Age (ṣāḥib al-zamān) (SAA), the rescripts (tawqīʿāt) 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. Iṣḥāq al-Ashʿarī, 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 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 ṬUthmān b. Saʿīd, who is represented in Dalāʾil al-imāma as the bāb70 of the Tenth and Eleventh Imams.71

If we accept the testimony of Dalāʾil 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 Dalāʾil 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 ṬUthmān 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 ṬUthmān 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, Dalāʾil, 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 Dalāʾil’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 Dalāʾil, Aḥmad b. Ishāq appears primarily appears 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, 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 Dalāʾil 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-ʿAskarī, 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 Shiʿi 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 Jaʿfar’s followers, some of whom are depicted as having misappropriated money from villagers in Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’. However, given the attempts of Jaʿfar 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 Kāfi, we are given an intimation of these difficulties:
‘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-ʾAskarī] about what was in the hands of the wakīls and they wanted an investigation (al-fahṣ). 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 النصر 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 dues⁷⁶.⁷⁷

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-ʾAskarī, and so should read Abū Muḥammad (al-ʾAskarī), instead of Abū al-Ḥasan (al-Ḥādī).
⁷⁶ Reading here qabad instead of qabṭ.
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 nāhiya, as it is now referred to:

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.”

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. Yaʾlā b. Ḥammād, and he bequeathed money to the nāhiya (awṣā li-al-nāḥiya bi-māl-in), and he ordered
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. Ishāq came to me with all of what was with him, and I was amazed, and I remained thinking, and a note (ruqʿa) 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 (ṣānān 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 nābiya 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 usūl al-kāfī, 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.

Saʿd 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’, and Badr the Eunuch, 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, 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,\textsuperscript{86} or to return them to their donors.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{status quo} which might be defensible to a wider community of believers beyond Samarra and Qumm, a \textit{status quo} in which members of the family of the Imams like Jaʿfar and Ḥudayth were less important than the institutional and epistemic authorities: the \textit{wakīl}s and the Qummī hadith-preservers.

\textbf{5.10 The coercion of the Ṭālibīds}

One report in Kulaynī gives an intriguing window into the political relations between the \textit{nāḥiya} and the powerful ʿAlid families. Notably the reporter of this report is a \textit{mawlā} whose patron was the daughter of the Ninth Imam, therefore a cousin once-removed of the Eleventh Imam.


\textsuperscript{87} In one report, indeed, the Qummīs are ordered to do bring their \textit{khums} back to Qumm by the Hidden Imam himself. Khaṣībī \textit{Hidāya}, 256-7.
Alī b. M>>>

Al-Faḍl al-Khazzāz al-Madāʾi inī mawlā of Khadīja bt. Muḥammad Abū Jaʿfar.⁸⁸ A group of the people of Medina from amongst the Ṭālibīds testified to the truth. However, the stipends (ważāʿif) were diverted from them at a well-known time (fī waqt maʿlūm); 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 nāhiya 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 wakīlāt 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 Shiʿi leanings. If we recall the maneuvers of Jaʿfar ‘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 ʿAlī al-Hāḍī.

⁸⁹ Kulaynī, Kāfī, 1:518-19.

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 Şādiq 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 Bābüya, Kamāl, 443-4.
95 For the wāqīfī 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. 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 شيئاً من المال، فإنه ينصب لنا ببغداد رجلاً يحمل إليه الأموال ويجير من عنده التوقيعات

And al-Qāʾim (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 (tawqīʿāt) would issue.”

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-Ashʿarī, then he disappeared (ghāba).” 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, Dalāʾ īl, 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 *nāhiya* as being centered on Baghdad.

Before the rise of Abū Jaʿfar 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 *nāhiya*, 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 *nāhiya* 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 (*ṣafīr*) 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-ʿAskārī’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 maʿrifat ḥuṣnāt allāh ʿalā al-ʿibād* (Beirut: Muʿassasat āl al-bayt, 1414/1993), 360. However, the same hadith as reported in Kulaynī’s *Kāfī* does not use the word Envoy (*ṣafīr*) suggesting that this is a post-Nuʿmānī 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī 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.”\textsuperscript{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 nāhiya 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{103} Sachedina, \textit{Islamic Messianism}, 88.
\textsuperscript{104} See Chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{105} See previous chapter.
One important reason why the shift away from Samarra made sense, is that the Caliph Muʿtaḍid moved his capital back to Baghdad in 279/892, after more than half a century with Samarra as capital, coinciding roughly with the probably dates of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’’s death. In the nuwwāb hadith and various other reports addressed in the previous chapter, Jaʿfar is depicted as appealing in vain to the arbitration of the Caliph, and to the Khāqānid vizier ʿUbayd Allāh b. Yahyā b. Khāqān. This suggests that the caliphal authorities may have been happy for Jaʿfar 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, Shiʿi 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 Shiʿi 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. We will return to this theme when we discuss the career of Ibn Rawḥ.

107 Kulaynī, Kāfī, 1: 505-6; Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 475-6.
108 Ismāʿīl 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 Shiʿa community and politics of the court, saying, “the fortunes [of the Shiʿa 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 Shiʿa 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 ʿAmrī 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, 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-Ţūsī’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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar.’ The note instructs him to then go back to Baghdad and pay the money to Ḥājiz. 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 Jaʿfar 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.
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 Jaʿfar ‘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 Ṯuwwāb 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-tahrīr al-mushtabih, suggesting that this was either a nickname, a foreign word or name, or simply an error. His nisba, al-washshāʾ suggests that he was a fine textile merchant, a not-uncommon calling among the prominent followers of the Imams in this period, 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-tahrīr al-mushtabih (Cairo, Dār al-miṣrīya li-ṭaʿlīf 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 ʿAmrīs (both were referred to by the epithet “the Oil Merchant”) from which many wakīls were drawn.\(^\text{114}\)

Ḥājiz’s obscurity is, in some ways, the mirror opposite of the obscurity of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 Jaʿfar, 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 ʿAmrīs 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:

\[
\text{علي بن محمد ، عن الحسن بن عبد الحميد قال : شككت في أمر حاجز فجمعت شيئا ثم صرت إلى العسكر ، فخرج}
\]

\[
\text{إلى ليس فيها شك ولا فيمن يقوم مقامنا بأمرنا رد ما معك إلى حاجز بن يزيد}
\]

\(^{114}\) See Mushegh Asatryan, “Bankers and Politics”.

321
ʿAlī b. Muḥammad

Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd said: I doubted about the leadership (amr) of Ḥājīz, and I collected something [i.e. money for the Imam] then went to the ʿAskar (Samarra) and a rescript (tawqīʿ) 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 Ḥājīz b. Yazīd.”

This report seems to position Ḥājīz 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 Ḥājīz’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 Shiʿi literature to refer to the succession of one Imam to another, and later, to the succession of one Envoy to another. Another report in Ibn Bābūya’s Kamāl uses the same phrase to refer to Ḥājīz in the context of supernatural inspiration, and suggests a relationship between Ḥājīz and the Hidden Imam in Samarra:

حدثني العاصمي أن ِجلا تفكر في ِجل يوصل إليه ما وجب للَريم عليه السلام وضاق به صدِه ، فسمع هاتفف يهتف به : " أوصل ما معك إلى حاجز " . قال : وخرج أبو محمد السروي إلى سر من ِأى ومعه مال

فخرج إليه البتاء " فليس فينا شك ولا فيمن يقوم مقاما شك ورد ما معك إلى حاجز "

Al-ʿĀṣimī related to me that a man kept on thinking about a man to whom he had sent what was due to the Creditor [al-gharîm: i.e., the Imam] and his breast contracted [in worry] and he heard a voice (hātif) calling to him, “Send what you have to Ḥājīz!” [Al-ʿĀṣimī] said: And Abū Muḥammad al-Sarawī went out to Samarra with money. And this was written to him (kharaja ilayhi) anticipating him (ibtidāʾ an): “We have no doubt,

---

115 Kulaynî, Kāfī, 1: 521.
116 Kulaynî, Kāfī, 1:327; Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 223.
and nor does he who stands in our place (\(\text{man qāma maqāmanā}\)), 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd during the Imamate of the Eleventh Imam, and later, for Abū Jaʿfar 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, \(\text{al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib}\) by Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Mashḥadī, (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 Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī ‘the Liar.’ Aḥmad heads first to Baghdad, where he meets Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshāʿ, perhaps suggesting that Ḥājiz was, at first, the representative of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ in Baghdad:

\[\text{فحملت المال وخرجت حتى دخلت بغداد ، فأتيت حاجز بن يزيد الوشاء ، فسلمت عليه وجلست فقال :} \]
\[\text{ألك حاجة ؟ فقلت : هذا مال دفع إلي لأدفعه إليك ، أخبرني كم هو ؟ ومن دفعه إلي ؟ فإن أخبرتني دفعته إليك . قال : لم}
\[\text{أمر بأخذه ، وهذه رفعة جامعتي بأمرك . فإذا فيها : }\]
\[\text{لا تقبل من أحمد بن أبي روح ، وتوجه به إلينا إلى سر من رأى ،} \]
\[\text{فقلت : لا إلا الله ، هذا أجل شئ أردته . فخرجت به ووافيت سر من رأى ،} \]
\[\text{قلت : أبدأ بجعفر ، ثم} \]

\(^{117}\) Ibn Bābūya, \(\text{Kamāl}\), 498-9.
So I carried the money and I went out until I entered Baghdad, and I came to Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washshāʾ, and I greeted him and sat, then he said, “Do you have a request (ḥāja)?”

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 (ruqʿa) 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 Jaʿfar [‘the Liar’]. Then I thought and I said, “I will begin with them [i.e. the nāḥiya, or the servants of the Eleventh Imam], in case the burden is with them, and if not, I will pass on to Jaʿfar.”

So I went down to the door of the house of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī](AS), and a servant came out to me and said, “’Are you Aḥmad b. Abī Rawḥ?’”

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “Read this note (ruqʿa).”[^1]

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

“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 Jaʿfar.”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 Jaʿfar, ‘the Liar’, but then turning to the Occultation faction, and diverting the canonical taxes away from Jaʿfar. This paradigm is familiar from the wakīls who diverted funds from Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar ‘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 Mashhādī, Thāqīb 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 Jaʿfar ‘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 nāhiya in the early Occultation period that rescripts from the Imam were generated in support of his leadership. In a report in Khašībī’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. Ṭabībī al-Qaṭṭānī said: al-Ḥasan b. Ṭabībī [i.e. the transmitter’s father] doubted about the leadership (amr) of Ḥājiz al-Washshāʾ 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.

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 (tawqīʿ) 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. Jaʿfar al-Qaṭṭān al-Qummi. 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 nāhiya, 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-Washshāʾ.

123 Khašībī, Hidāya, 278.
authority of the nāhiya, in particular Ḥājiz, in the new era, prefiguring the prominent use of rescripts by Abū Jaʿfar.

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 nāhiya 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 ʿAmrīs, Kulaynī mentions nothing. However, in one of the Qummī delegation hadiths in Ibn Bābūya’s Kamāl, we see ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, Ḥājiz and ʿAqīd the Eunuch all present, and responding to the problematic claims of Jaʿfar. 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 Madāʾ in on behalf of Imam al-ʿAskarī, 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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).” 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, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd is depicted in a very minor role. Instead, it was not ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, but ʿAqīd 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 ʿAmrī ascendency, however, one would have expected this report to express a more fully pro-ʿAmrī position, instead of highlighting the role of ʿAqīd 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 Nuʿmānī, 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 Bābüya’s Kamāl that does not include this correction of status. In Ibn Bābüya’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’iḥ, but with the insertion of a passage of dialogue in which the subordination of Ḥājiz to the ‘Amrīs is made clear:

---

127 Ibn Bābüya, Kamāl, 488.
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.”

This mention of ‘the Shaykh’ is, in the context, clearly a reference either to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī or to Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, 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 Kāfī is greater than that of Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī and his father, who are mentioned only in the thiqa hadith. Instead, the subordination of Ḥājiz to al-ʿAmrī 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 Jaʿfar died many years later, in 305/917. Assuming Abū Jaʿfar 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

---

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 Shiʿa 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.\(^\text{129}\) 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, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar. This would be a further step in the desire of the local communities in Qumm and the Jībāl 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, \textit{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: ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī gives his death date as 312/924-5. 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-ʿAskarī.

Interestingly enough, Ṭūsī also refers to him as “one of the bābs.” 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

---


131 Ṭūsī, Rijāl, 439.
However, as the testimony of Abū Sahl’s Tanbih suggests, al-Asadī, though not part of the old guard, must have been nominated before Ḥājiz died, and therefore before Abū Jaʿfar (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 312/924-5. The same report, transmitted by Muḥammad b. Shādhān al-Nīṣābūrī states that “al-Asadī died in evident probity (ʿadāla), never changing, with no one accusing him.” According to Najāshī, he authored a book called Kitāb al-radd ’alā ahl-al-istiṭāʿa, its title suggesting it might have been an anti-Muʿtazila 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 Jaʿfar 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.” 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”, and the reference in Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥalabī’s, *Rijāl*, that “he was reliable (*thiqā*), sound in hadith (*ṣaḥīḥ*), except that there was an accusation (*ta’n*) which necessitated his mention among the weak transmitters (*duʿafāʾ*). 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 Ḥājīz:

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 : سألني بعض الناس في سنة تسعين وما نئتين قبض شئ ، فامتنعت من ذلك وكتبت أستطلع الرأي ، فأتاني الجواب : " بالري محمد بن جعفر العربي فليدفع إليه فإنه من ثقاتنا "

Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Abī Jayyid al-Qummī

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Walīd

Muḥammad b. Yahyā al-ʿAṭṭār

Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Yahyā

---

Ṣāliḥ b. Abī Ṣāliḥ 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. Jaʿfar the Arab [al-Asadī], so let him pay him, for he is one of our reliable ones (thiqāt).”

This, then, shows that al-Asadī was indeed ‘one of the trustworthy ones’ (thīqa) of the Imam, and was operating in 290/903 at the time when Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhṭī wrote his Tanbīḥ, 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 Ḥājīz which was followed by the designation of al-Asadī to the succession. Again, the narrator, Ṣāliḥ 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 Ḥājīz’s death, and that this took place around 290/903. This strongly suggests that Ḥājīz 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 Jaʿfar could establish his own authority and reestablish the idea of Envoy, employing the basic mechanisms established by Ḥājīz after his defection from Jaʿfar ‘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. Jaʿfar al-Asadī who succeeded Ḥājīz? 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 ʿAlī 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 nāhiya 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 Baghdadī 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 Shiʿi Imams going back to the time of ʿAlī. However, traditions regarding Kufan support for the Hidden Imam and the nāhiya 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-
Kūfī’s list of wakīls and laymen who saw the Hidden Imam is distinctly short on Kufans.\textsuperscript{139} If we compare our sources for references to Kufa, neither Kulaynī,\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{141} As we have seen, many of these relate to Kufans supporting Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’, but we also have references to supporters of the Hidden Imam hailing from Kufa and the Sawād.\textsuperscript{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 Jaʿfar which looms large in Khaṣībī’s account. One possible answer is that the Kufans, unlike the Qummīs, were more deeply implicated in allegiance to Jaʿfar ‘the Liar.’ As we have seen in the previous chapter, Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ was certainly supported by Kufans, including those among the fāṭhiyya who pledged their allegiance to him; the followers of Fāris b. Ḥātim. If we assume that a large number of Kufans followed Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’, this would suggest that they would be particularly severely affected by the era of perplexity once Jaʿfar was ultimately rejected.

In addition, the activities of the Ismaili mission began to gain a following in and around Kufa, where Ḥamdān b. Qar maṭ converted and engaged in the daʿwa around 264/877-8.\textsuperscript{143} One

\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{140} Kulaynī carries a single report which seems to cast aspersions on Kufa as a place where excessive alcohol consumption takes place. Kāfī, 1:523.
\textsuperscript{141} Friedman, Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs, 9, 17, 20.
\textsuperscript{142} Khaṣībī, Hidāya, 246-8, 255-6, 394-5.
\textsuperscript{143} See Wilferd Madelung, “Ḥamdān Ṭar maṭ,” EJ2.
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. Faraḥ b. Ḥawshab b. Zādān al-Kūfī, known as al-Manṣūr or Manṣūr al-Yaman. Al-Qāḍī Nu‘mān’s Ifītāḥ
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-Kūfā from a learned Shi‘i 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
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 Qurʿān. 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 daʿwa. While this is a single narrative¹⁴⁵ it is highly suggestive of the kind of narratives available to many of the Shiʿi 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 has 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 Jaʿfar, in their attempts to police doctrine and community identity after the death of the Eleventh Imam.

In contrast to both Ḥājiz and ῾Uthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 hadith, and authored many books of law and doctrine. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār

¹⁴⁴ Qāḍī Nuʿmān, Iḥtiāḥ, translation, 21-23.
¹⁴⁵ Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd carries a report in which a man with the nisba ‘al-ḥamānī’ mentions “a great man of the jurists (fuqahāʾ) of our people” who had converted to become a Qarmatī. Irshād, 2: 359.
was the brother of ʿAlī, and transmitted his books.\footnote{Najāshī, \textit{Rijāl}, 253-4. Kashshī, \textit{Rijāl}, 388. Ṭūsī, \textit{Fihrist}, 152.} Muḥammad was the son of Ibrāhīm, and is mentioned among the \textit{rijāl} of the Eleventh Imam, ʿAskarī, though not receiving the status of reliable (\textit{thiqa}) or sound (\textit{sahīḥ}) in Ṭūsī’s \textit{Rijāl}, as other members of his family do, presumably because of his moment of doubt.\footnote{Ṭūsī, \textit{Rijāl}, 402.} 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 \textit{wakil} 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 بَداد و نزلت في خان، فلما كان اليوم الثاني إذ جاء شيخ و دق الباب، فقلت للِلام 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

\textit{Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Kulthūm al-Sarakhsī}>>>

\textit{Iṣḥāq b. Muḥammad al-Ḵaṣrī}>>>
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-ʿAmrī, 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. ʿAmr was a wakīl for Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAskarī (AS), and as for Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Ḥafṣ b. ʿAmr, he was the son of al-ʿAmrī, and he was the wakīl of the nāḥiya and the leadership of the community (amr) revolved around him.⁴⁴⁸

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

---

⁴⁴⁸ 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 Mahziyārs 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 Jaʿfar as “the son of al-ʿAmrī”, suggesting that we must identify the “al-ʿAmrī” in the narrative as the elder ‘Amrī, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. Given that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿAmrī wakīl here is Ḥafs b. ʿAmr, rather than ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, it seems reasonable to identify him as the same figure as ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, playing a key role in the nāḥiya.
mythic in its register, throwing doubt on its utility as a source for dating. 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-ʿAskarī.

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 جبريل الأهوازي ، عن إبراهيم ومحمد ابني الفرج ، عن محمد بن إبراهيم بن مهبازر أنه
ورد العراق شاكا مرتادا ، فخرج إليه " قل للمعزي قل فهمنا ما حكيته عن موالينا بناحيتكم 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 أدم 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 Tāʾ if. It is also remarkable that it refers to two sons of al-ʿAskarī, one called Mūsā, the other called M-H-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 بدأ 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 كاهن. 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)>

Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī>

ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Rāzī known as ʿAllān al-Kulaynī>

Muḥammad b. Jibrāʾīl 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 (tawqīʿ) to him:

“Say to al-Mahziyārī:

We have understood what you said about our followers (mawālī) in your jurisdiction (bi-nāḥiyatikum).

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 (maʿāqil) to whom you can have refuge, and signs by which you may be guided, from Adam (AS), until the deceased [al-ʿAskarī]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]”.

344
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 فعيرها وختم الشيخ بخاتمة وقال لك : اختم مع خاتمي ، فإن أعش فأنا أحق بها ، وإن أمت فأتق الله في نفسك وأولا ثم في ، فخلصني وكن عند ظني بك . أخرج ِحمك الله الدنانير التي استفضلتها من بين النقدين من حسابنا وهي بضعة عشر دينارا واسترد من قبلك فإن الزمان أصعب مما كان ، وحسنبنا 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-khallīṣnī wa-kun `inda ẓannī 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 (biḍ'ata ʿashara 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.”

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 nāhiya’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 nāhiya 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 nāhiya.

154 Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 487.
The narrative continues following this rescript, as Ibn Mahziyar provides a first-person account of his meeting with a woman appearing to represent the nāhiya.

 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 وارج الليلة فإن الباب مفتوح لك فادخل الدار واصعد البيت الذي فيه السراج ، ففعلت وقصدت الباب فإذا هو مفتوح فدخلت الدار وقصدت البيت الذي وصفته فيها أنا بين القبرين أنتحب وأبكي إذ سمعت صوته وهو يقول : يا محمد اتق الله وتب من كل ما أنت عليه فقد قلدت أمرًا عظيما

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm said: “I came to al-ʿAskar on pilgrimage [zāʿiran] and I headed for the nāhiya. 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 ʿazīman)”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 Dalāʾil 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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ took possession of the house, probably, therefore between 260/874 and 262/876. The chain of transmission goes through Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh who died in 299-301/911-14, before Abū Jaʿfar. Notably, there is no mention of the ʿAmrīs here. The early nāhiya 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 وأكترني دارا على الشئ ولا أخبر أحدا بشئ وإن وضح لي شئ كوضوحه [ في ] أيام أبي محمد عليه السلام أخفته 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 opulence\(^{158}\) 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 \(wakīl\)s 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 Jaʿfar, all of which leads us to conclude that they refer to the earliest phase of the Occultation era before the rise of Abū Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar, for Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar. 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 \(wāqīfī\) \(wakīl\)s who withheld money from ʿAlī al-Riḍā from financial motives, as well as with the supporters of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ who absconded with the money collected on his behalf. See above, Chapter 4.

\(^{159}\) Kulaynī, \(Kāfī\), 1:518.
the Eleventh Imam.\footnote{Khaššībī, \textit{Hidāya}, 276–7; Kulaynī, \textit{Kāfī}, 1:518.} 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, 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 nāhiya and figures in the household of the Imams in Samarra in the immediate aftermath of the death of Imam ʿAskarī. 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,\footnote{Thus justifying Ibn Mahziyār’s inclusion in Muḥammad al-Kūfī’s list of the wakīls who saw the Hidden Imam.} 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
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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, 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, 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī 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. 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 Shiʿi 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 wāqīfa 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 wāqīfa 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

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 nāhiya appears to have been a supernatural voice (ḥātif), 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 Kāfī and Khašībī’s Hidāya, involving a certain Egyptian named ʿAbd Rabbihi, or Ibn ʿAbd Rabbīhi. 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 Khašībī’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 صارية فجلس في ظلة كانت لأبي محمد ( عليه"
السلام ) وكان سيدي أبو محمد رام ان أعشي عنده وانا أفكر في نفسي فلو كان شي لظهير بعد ثلاث سنين فذاؤ
بهاتف يقول لي اسمع صوته ولا أرى شخصه يا عبد ربه فل اهل مصر هل رأيتم رسول الله ( صلى الله عليه وآله
) حيث أمنت به قال : ولم أكن اعرف اسم أبي وذاتي خرجت من مصر وانا طفل صغير فقلت ان صاحب
الزمان بعد أبيه حق وان غيبته حق وان الهاتف بي فزال عني الشك وثبت اليقين.

Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Kūfī>>>

Abū Khālid al-Baṣrī known as ʿAbd Rabbihi said: I went out on the Mecca road three
years after the passing of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] (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-ʿAskarī] 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 (ḥātif) whose sound I could hear, without seeing his figure, said: “Oh
ʿAbd 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 (ḥātif bī),” and the doubt fell
from me, and certainty was established.165

In this report, then, the voice puts the doubts of ʿAbd 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 ʿAbd Rabbihi was
initially ‘thinking to himself’ (qultu fī nafsī) fits into a trope common in our sources, especially

165 Khaṣibī, 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. Thus the voice fits the mold of an Imamic figure. And sure enough, ʿAbd Rabbihī later realizes that the voice must have been that of the Imam.

In one of the reports quoted above, transmitted by a certain al-ʿĀṣimī, a voice (ḥātif) responds to a man’s anxiety about the problem of delivering the canonical taxes in the doubtful era of Ḥājīz. This voice speaks to confirm Ḥājīz in authority as the one who “stands in the place of” the Hidden Imam or his nāḥiya. 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, 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, ḥātif, to refer to the Hidden Imam. 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 ḥātif report, the voice actually intervenes to interpret, and later to miraculously correct the text of a rescript that has been issued from Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī in the Imam’s name, again enforcing the necessity of sending money to the nāḥiya.

---

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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmīrī, 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 ‘Askari’s men, and the later generation who had no contact with ‘Askari. 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī as eyewitness to the Imam; Ḥājiz b. Yazīd al-Washšāʾ 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 Ḥājīz 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 Jībāl 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. Isḥāq’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. Isḥāq, as we shall see, is depicted as associating with the elder Ḥājiz, but not the younger. In the Dalāʾil, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq 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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar,’ but soon repudiated Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar, appears, however, to have be 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 if 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 generations, 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. Išāq 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: ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī: Envoy or wakīl?

6.1 Overview

We have mentioned ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as one of the old guard of companions of al-ʿAskarī 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 Shiʿism.

Who was ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd? 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 Shiʿi 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’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. Saʿīd 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. Saʿīd 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī had been established that claims were made that ‘Uthmān b. Saʿīd 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. Saʿīd 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-ʿAskarī.¹ It is likely that he was of humble birth, without any prestigious forbears amongst the Shiʿa that would have led to his lineage being more carefully preserved. Ṭūsī, in his Rijāl, places ‘Uthmān b. Saʿīd 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 إحدي 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). 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. 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 Zarīf (Kulaynī, Kāfī, 1: 332); an unnamed man from Fārs and a slave girl, (Kulaynī, Kāfī, 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 ʿAbbasid society of the time. It does, however, suggest that he was not of an established scholarly or elite family. This is perhaps an important point in placing some distance between the ʿAmrī 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 Shiʿi 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd once his role as ‘the First Envoy’ had become dogma. Ṭūsī’s Ghayba depicts ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as having transported canonical Islamic taxes to the Imam in order to escape the gaze of the persecuting authorities:

ويقال له : السمان ، لأنه كان يتجار في السمن تْطية على الامر . وكان الشيعة إذا حملوا إلى أبي محمد عليه السلام ما يجب عليهم حمله من الأموال أنفذهوا إلى أبي عمرو ، فيجعله في جراب السمن وزقاقه ويحمله إلى أبي محمد عليه السلام تقية وخوفا.

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 Shiʿa carried the money which they were obliged to carry to Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī, the Eleventh Imam] (AS), they dispatched it to Abū Ṭūmān b. Saʿīd and he put it the oil sacks (jurāb al-saman) and oil skins (ziqāq) and carried it to Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] (AS) out of taqiyya and fear.

4 See Tabarī, Tārīkh, translation, 34: 10-11, with reference to the vizier named al-Zayyāt: suggests it could be consistent with high rank.
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 Ṭūmān b. Saʿīd, is responsible for the circulation of reports that burnish the reputation of his ancestors. This kind of gloss on his soubriquet may have been a way of saving Ṭūmān b. Saʿīd 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 Ṭūmān b. Saʿīd’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 Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr. While Ṭūmān b. Saʿīd becomes the commonly accepted name for him, following Ṭūsī, the confusion is not entirely resolved by the later Rijāl authors. Thus, for example, al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, in Khūlāṣat al-aqwāl, prefers to retain a biography for both Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr, “known as al-ʿAmrī, the wakīl of Abū Muḥammad al-ʿAskarī” and Ṭūmān b. Saʿīd, both of which are said to have a son Muḥammad.  

6.2 Ṭūmān b. Saʿīd was not an Envoy during the Occultation

In contrast to the canonical Twelver narratives, while Ṭūmān 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

---

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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī 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 Jaʿfar, not least because he did not belong to the older generation, this seems to be a fairly accurate representation of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s role. It must be emphasized that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was almost entirely a pre-Occultation figure.

### 6.3 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was a wakīl during the lifetime of the Eleventh Imam

While there are various statement in which ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was a trusted wakīl who acted on behalf of the Eleventh Imam. While this

---

\(^{10}\) Klemm, “*Sufrāʾ,*” 146.

\(^{11}\) See below.
appears to have been adapted in the recension of ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, we can at least assume that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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-ʿAmrī (who he knows as Ḥafṣ b. ʿAmr al-ʿAmrī, rather than ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd), as collecting dues on behalf of the Imam. In one report, transmitted by a Nishapuri wakīl Iṣḥāq b. Ismāʿīl al-Nīṣabūrī, a rescript is issued to the wakīl in which various wakīls are praised, including al-Bilālī, who would later oppose Abū Jaʿfar in the Occultation period, but here is praised as “the reliable, the trustworthy” (al-thiqa al-maʾmūn). However, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd does appear to be picked out for particular praise:

العمري ِضي الله عنه برضاي عنه ، وتسلم عليه وتعرفه ويعرفك فإنه الطاهر الأمين العفيف القريب منا والينا، فكل ما يحمل إلينا من شيء من النواحي فإليه المسير... ليوصل ذلك إلينا

Al-ʿAmrī [ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd] (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…

In this statement, al-ʿAmrī (who we take to be ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, due to the fact that he was a member of ʿAskarī’s old guard, unlike Abū Jaʿfar) 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
Certainly we may state that the image of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s wakīlāte is in the words of Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-Karkhī, a later detractor of the authority of the younger ʿAmrī, Abū Jaʿfar. When asked why he denies the wakīlāte of Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar] for the wikāla, though God does not deny his father (meaning ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd), but as for stating with certainty that Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar accepted the status of his father as wakīl, though this does not necessarily suppose that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s wakīlāte was anything out of the ordinary. As for the obscurity of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd does not suggest that he was not a wakīl.

From these pieces of evidence, we may conclude that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as a means of anointing Abū Jaʿfar

While our analysis of the earliest narratives suggests that the genealogy of the position of Envoy leads back mainly to the figure of Ḥajiz, later Twelver tradition prefers to provide Abū Jaʿfar 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and Abū Jaʿfar’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 ʿAmr ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd died, his son Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān took his position through the designation (naṣṣ) of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] (AS), and the designation of his father ʿUthmān upon him by order of the Qāʾim [the Twelfth Imam].

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 ʿAlī. 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. Thus, Ibn Bābūya quotes a rescript (tawqīʿ) that shows an explicit statement of the succession between the elder and younger ʿAmrī. As with the thiqa hadith which we will analyze below, this report is transmitted by the pro-ʿAmrī scholar ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī:

The rescript (tawqīʿ) came out to Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī, in mourning (taʿziya) 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-amrīhi] in [the Imam’s] affair (amr) [i.e. the Safirate]… "17

ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar, then, appears again to be a key node for the transmission of reports in support of the ʿAmrīs. The issuing of a rescript to Abū Jaʿfar himself, which was then transmitted via the pro-ʿAmrī ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī suggests that the report of the succession of Abū Jaʿfar 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd during the Occultation, we must assume that the legacy which Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, was transmitted in 280/893 before which ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s must have died, and his son, Abū Jaʿfar must have begun to make his claims to authority.

6.5 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was barely active during the Occultation

There are various clear indications that mention Abū Jaʿfar as the Occultation-era leader of the nāhiya, in contrast with ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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-ʿAskarī]. And as for Abū Jaʿfar b. Ḥafṣ b. ‘Amr, well, he was the son of al-ʿAmrī, and he was the wakīl of the nāhiya, and the affair [i.e. leadership of the Shiʿi community] revolved around him (wa kāna al-amr yadūru ʿalayhi).18

Again, this account suggests a clear chronological separation between the elder ʿAmrī who is identified as the wakīl of the Eleventh Imam, while Abū Jaʿfar 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 exclusively for the Occultation-era continuation of the Imamic institutions. 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. 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 Noṣayr,” 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, Kāfūr the Eunuch comes to them and reports the following words from the Imam:

عثمان بن سعيد العمري وكيلي في مالي وابنه محمد وكيل ابني المهدي

ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī is my wakīl over my money, and Muḥammad [Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī] is the wakīl of my son, the awaited Mahdī.”

Again, this corroborates the distinction found in Kashshī in which ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd is seen to operate in the pre-Occultation era, under the Eleventh Imam, while Abū Jaʿfar is seen as operating in the Occultation era. A further report in the Hidāya, addresses the anxiety regarding the relationship between the bāb and the wakīl in a remarkable manner, by incorporating Abū Jaʿfar into the genealogy of spiritual authority of Ibn Nuṣayr. Again however, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd is left out:

عن محمد بن إسماعيل الحسني عن أبي الحسن صاحب العسكر... كانت كتبه ودلائله وتوقيعاته (عليه السلام)

تخرج عل 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. Ismāʿīl al-Ḥasanī said about Abū al-Ḥasan Ṣāḥib al-ʿAskar [al-Hādī]:… [The Imam’s] letters and signs and rescripts (tawqīʿāt) were issued at the hands of Abū Shuʿayb 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. ʿUthmān.

---

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 Jaʿfar, excluding ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. Again, then, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd is left out of the Occultation era.

Ibn Bābūya quotes many reports of the activities of Abū Jaʿfar, but gives only scant mention of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, and these reports are, again, linked to the lifetime of the Eleventh Imam. Nuʿmānī’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 general terms, and so does not help us to understand the role of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. Mufīd does mention the Envoys, though he does not yet produce the classical canon of the Four Envoys. Only with Ṭūsī’s Ghayba, composed around 448/1056-57, do we have a clear indication of Four “Praised Envoys”, starting with ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī. 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī himself. 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, Ṭūsī’s Ghayba also contains reports that plainly suggest that only

---

25 Nuʿmānī, Ghayba, 164; 178-9.
26 See Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 86.
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:

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 (nahwan 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 answers.28

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 (nahwan 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿAmrīs into pre- and post-Occultation roles, saying that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s was the Imam’s pre-Occultation wakīl, while Abū Jaʿfar was the preeminent figure in the Occultation-era nāḥiya.

6.6 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as eyewitness and ‘the reliable’

Kulaynī’s Kāfī, 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 ʿAmrīs. 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, he is not depicted in Kulaynī’s Kāfī as carrying out the activities of a tax-collector at all. The key report transmitted by Kulaynī about ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was the

29 See Chapter 3.
Saʿīd is reported on the authority of two figures who were crucial in the formation of the Occultation-era understanding of the Hidden Imam: ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥīmyarī and Aḥmad b. Isḥāq, 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 عبدالرحيم بن عبد الله وهو محمد بن حمزة جميعا ، عن عبد الله بن جعفر الحميري قال : اجتمعنا أنا والشيخ أبو عمرو

رحمه الله عند أحمد بن إسحاق فتمزني 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 أمنت

من قبل أو كسبت في إيمانها خيرا، فأولئك أشرا من خلق الله عز وجل وهم الذين تقوم عليهم القيادة ولكنني

احببت أن أزداد بقيادة وإبراهيم عليه السلام سأل ربه عز وجل أن يريه كيف يحيي الموتى، قال: أو لم تؤمن

قال : بلني ولكن ليطمنن قلبي.

(2)

وقد أخبرني أبو علي أحمد بن إسحاق، عن أبي الحسن عليه السلام قال : سأله وقلت : من أعمال أو عمن أخذ

وقول من أقبل؟ فقال له : العمري ثقتي فما أدى إليك عن عني فعندك يا رجل أن تريد كيف يحيي الموتى، قال: أو لم تؤمن

وأطعم، فإنه الثقة المأمون.

(1)

وأخبرني أبو علي أنه سأل أبي محمد عليه السلام عن مثل ذلك، فقال له: العمري وابنه ثقتان، فما أدأ إليك عن
فعلي يؤديان وما قالا لك فعلي يقولان، فاسمع لهما وأطمعهما فإنهم الثقتان المأمونان، فهذا قول إمامين قد مضيا
فيك. قال: فخر أبو عمرو ساجدا وبكى ثم قال: سأل حاجتك؟ فقلت له: أنت أيتي الخلف من بعد أبي محمد عليه
السلام؟ فقال: إني والله ورقيته مثل ذاك - وأومأ بيده - قلت له: فيقيت واحدة حاجتك لي؟ قال: فالاسم؟ قال:
محرم عليكم أن تسألوا عن ذلك، ولا أقول هذا من عندي، فلا أقول من دونه، ولكن عنه عليه السلام،
فإن الأمر عند السلطان، أن أبي محمد مضى ولم يخلف ولدا وقسام ميراثه وأخذ من لا حق له فيه، ورى آية،
يفولون ليس أحد يجرس أن يتعرف إليهم أو ينيلهم شيئا، وإذا وقع الاسم وقع الطلب، فاتقوا الله وأمسكوا عن ذلك.

PART I

Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā

ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī said: I and the Shaykh Abū ʿAmr [ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-
ʿAmrī] (RA)31 gathered at the place of Āḥmad b. Ishāq. Aḥmad b. Ishāq hinted
(ghamaza) that I should ask him about the offspring (khalaf)32.

So I said to him "Oh Abū ʿAmr, I want to ask you about something, regarding which I am
not doubtful; for my doctrine (iʿtiqād) 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 rahimahu
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 `Alī 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-‘Amrī is my reliable one (thīqa), and what he delivers to you, he delivers that from me, and what he says to you, he says from me, so listen to him, and obey, for he is the reliable, the trustworthy (al-thīqa al-ma’ūn)."

**PART 3**

And Abū `Alī [Aḥmad b. Ishāq] reported to me that he asked Abū Muḥammad [al-`Askarī, the Eleventh Imam] (AS) about the same thing, and he said to him “Al-‘Amrī and his son are both trusted associates (thīqa), 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-thīqatān al-ma’ūnān).”

And this is the speech of two Imams who passed amongst you.

**PART 1, continued**

[‘Abd Allāh b. Ja’far al-Ḥimyarī] said: And Abū ’Amr 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 Qur’ān 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 ‘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."34

This composite hadith has been compiled out of three separate reports, perhaps by Kulaynī but more likely by ‘Abd 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 ‘Abd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī in which Aḥmad b. Ishāq is depicted as catalyzing ‘Abd Allāh b. Jaʿfar’s question to Ṣuṭhān b. Saʿīd about the existence of the Child Imam. Notably this framing report does not mention that Ṣuṭhān 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 Ṭā'īy as the “reliable, the trustworthy” (al-thiqa al-maʾmūn). The latter of the two reports also designates the younger ‘Amrī, Abū Jaʿfar in the same capacity. Crucially for later Shiʿa, 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: Ṭā’īy as eyewitness to the existence of the Child Imam, and Ṭā’īy 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 Ṭā’īy’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 Ṭā’īy as eyewitness; and the embedded report in which the ‘Amrīs are delegated to represent the Imam’s authority. Various reports show Ṭā’īy 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 neck\(^{36}\) indicating his miraculous, prolific growth, in keeping with other prophetic and

---

\(^{35}\) This appears to be the image that ‘Abd Allāh b. Jaʿfar 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, Kāfī, 329-330; 331. See also Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 430-1, in which Abū Jaʿfar 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. Jaʿfar, transmits the eyewitness account from Abū Jaʿfar, the younger ‘Amrī, rather than his father, suggesting either that there was a confusion

381
heroic Children who serve as archetypes for the Child Imam, like Abraham.\textsuperscript{37} Ţūsī transmits a version also from Aḥmad b. Ishāq via ‘Abd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥīmyarī. 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 سعد القمي قال : دخلت على أبي الحسن علي بن محمد صلوات الله عليه في يوم من الأيام فقلت : يا سيدي أنا أغيب وأشهد ولا يتهيأ لي الوصول إليك إذا شهدت في كل وقت ، فقال لي العمو الثقة الأمين ما قاله لكم فإني أصدقه وأدان إليه. فلما مضى أبو الحسن عليه السلام وصلت إلى أبي محمد ابنه الحسن العسكري عليه السلام ذات يوم فقالت له عليه السلام مثل قولي لأبيه ، فقال لي : هذا أبو عمرو الثقة الأمين، ثقة الماضي وثقتي في المحيا والممات ، فما قاله لكم فإني أصدقه وأدان إليه. لما أنا أغيب وأشهد ، ولا يتهيأ لي الوصول إليك إذا شهدت في كل وقت ، فإني أصدقه وأدان إليه

Aḥmad b. Ishāq b. Saʿd al-Qummī said: I went in to Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī 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. ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd], the reliable, the trustworthy (\textit{al-thiq\textsuperscript{a} al-maʾmūn}). 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-ʿAskarī (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

---

\textsuperscript{37} Ṭabarī, \textit{Tārīkh}, translation, 2: 50-60. See Ibn Bābūya, \textit{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.”  

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 Jaʿfar. In addition, this report modifies the sense in which ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 Jaʿfar. 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. 

Following the report above, Ṭūsī quotes an evocative editorial comment from ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar 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 ʿAmr.” 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 ʿAmrī 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 ʿAmrī leadership.

The transmitters of these reports about the ʿAmrīs 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. ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar 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-hayra), and he is a key transmitter for hadiths from the younger ʿAmrī, Abū Jaʿfar.40

To sum up what we have learnt from these reports, though they were eventually used to establish the idea of the Safīrate through Imamic designation, initially, they are more circumscribed to showing that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s represented the Tenth and Eleventh Imams during their lifetimes. The only role that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ having inherited the property of the Imam. As for Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, it is

40 In addition, a similarly named Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī appears in one report in Ibn Bābūya’s Kamāl in the guise of the interrogator of Jaʿfar ‘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-ʿAbbās Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī said, “Let us stay until this man [Jaʿfar ‘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 Jaʿfar’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-*maʾmūn*”

ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s epithet, “the reliable, the trustworthy” (*al-*thiqa al-*maʾmūn*), 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’ (*maʾmūn*), 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’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, ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī explicitly refers to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s excellence as a transmitter:

أنت الآن ممن لا يشك في قوله وصدقه فأسألك بحق الله وبحق الإمامين اللذين وثقاك هل ِأيت 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-Hāḍī

and al-ʿAskarī, have you seen the son of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī], who is the Lord of the Age (ṣāḥib al-zamān)?”

This places the emphasis squarely upon the epistemological role of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd “the wakīl and the reliable, the one entrusted with God’s money” (al-wakīl wa al-thiqa al-maʾmūn ʿalā māl Allāh). However, clearly the two senses of “al-thiqa al-maʾmūn” 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s status as thiqa was gradually inflated to be understood as an implicit designation of leadership. This process which started with ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī’s recension of the composite hadith regarding ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd is introduced using a derivation of thiqa, as the “entrusted Shaykh” (al-shaykh al-mawthūq bihi).

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. Iṣḥāq 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. Isḥāq appears in a number of reports that highlight handwriting, the first of which occurs during the lifetime of Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī:

محمد بن يحيى ، عن أحمد بن إسحاق قال : دخلت على أبي محمد عليه السلام فسألته أن يكتب لأنظر إلى خطه فأعرفه إذا وِد ، فقال : نعم ، ثم قال : يا أحمد إن الخط سيختلف عليك من بين القلم الَليظ إلى القلم الدقيق فلا تشك

Muḥammad b. Yahyā

Aḥmad b. Isḥāq: I wrote to Abū Muḥammad [ʿAskarī] 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 Isḥāq, handwriting will differ for you between a coarse pen and a fine pen, but do not doubt!”

This report seems to anticipate the embarrassment of the era of perplexity, suggesting perhaps that there will be doubt about whether communications from al-ʿAskarī are authentic. This report may perhaps be related to the group who claimed that the Imamate had stopped at al-ʿAskarī himself and that he had gone into Occultation. There are however other reports in which Aḥmad b. Isḥāq uses al-ʿAskarī’s handwriting as a means of verifying communication from the Hidden Child Imam, including a family report transmitted from Aḥmad b. Isḥāq by his grandson.46

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. Isḥāq 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-ʿAskarī, in contradiction and defense against the reports of the phantom pregnancy.

Again, then, Aḥmad b. Isḥāq 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, which we will address in the following chapter.

6.7 The testimony of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq and ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī

We will now turn to consider transmission history of the narratives of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. 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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ in the previous chapter, his rejection by Qummī delegates was crucial in his overall failure. Several versions of this Qummī rejection of Jaʿfar the liar exist. Aḥmad b. Isḥāq is remembered in the Qummī sources as both instrumental to this rejection of Jaʿfar, and as a crucial link in the chains of transmission giving witness to the Child Imam. These two facts
suggest that Ḥmad b. Ishāq was a central figure in propagating the idea of the Child Imam and the Occultation as guiding principles in the new era. Ḥmad 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 Ḥmad b. Ishāq. Firstly, regarding Ḥmad 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, Ḥmad b. Ishāq is recorded as not having seen the Imam himself, but rather as connecting ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī with an eyewitness in the form of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. A generation later, by the time of Ibn Bābūya, the reports regarding Ḥmad 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 القيم قال: لما ولد الخلف الصالح عليه السلام وِد عن مولانا أبي محمد الحسن بن علي عليه السلام إلى جدي أحمد بن إسحاق كتاب فإذا فيه مكتوب بخط يده عليه السلام الذي كان ترد به التويقات عليه، وفيه: ولد لنا مولود فليكن عندك مستوّا وعن جميع الناس مكتومًا، فإنا 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. ʿAlī [ʿAskarī] (AS) to my grandfather Aḥmad b. Ishāq, and in it was [the Imam’s] handwriting in which he used to respond to the rescripts (tawqīʿāt): “A child is born to us, but let him remain concealed with you, hidden away from the majority of people (fal-yakun ʿindaka mastūran wa ʿan jamʿ 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.

This report tends to contradict the report in Kulaynī in which Aḥmad b. Ishāq is reliant upon
ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 *Dalāʾil* 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. Ṭūsī also states that Aḥmad b. Ishāq had seen the Imam. 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.

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

---

48 Ibn Rustum al-Tabarī, *Dalāʾil*, 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* (*ʿIlal al-ṣawm*) and *The Questions of the Men to Abū al-
  Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 91. Ṭūsī has much the same details, with slightly different book titles, *Fihrist*, 70.
of the Hidden Imam and ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. Instead, our attention is drawn to ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥīmyarī who appears a far more likely candidate to have been involved with spreading news of the Occultation. Ahmād b. Ishāq’s eyewitness accounts were transmitted by ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥīmyarī, who was an important figure in the consolidation and transmission of Occultation ideas. ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥīmyarī 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], (Masāʾil al-rijāl wa mukātibātuhum abā al-ḥasan al-thāli̇th [al-Hādī]), and, as we have mentioned, The Responsa of Abū Muḥammad and the Rescripts (Masāʾil Abī Muḥammad wa al-tawqīʿāt), or as Ṭūsī calls it, The Responsa of Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan [al-ʿAskarī] by the Hand of Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī (Masāʾil li Abī Muḥammad al-Ḥasan [al-ʿAskarī] (AS) ʿalā yad Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī) 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 ṣāḥib al-amr) (AS). Najāshī mentions that he composed a book called The Book of Occultation and Perplexity (Kitāb al-ghayba wa al-hayra). 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) which tantalizingly suggests that ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar 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
preserved. One of ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar’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 šāḥib al-amr*, which suggests that it was a collection of the statements of the Hidden Imam.

Thus we may say that ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar 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 ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar knew about the Occultation was transmitted to his fellow Qummī, Ibn Bābūya, whose *Kamāl* relies heavily upon narratives that include ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar in their chains of transmission for both accounts of the Occultation and also for information about the life and activities of Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī.

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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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

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 *Tanbhīh*.

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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd appear in the same narrative as something approaching rivals for the Imam’s favor:

\[\text{محمد بن اسماعيل و علي بن عبد الله الحسنان قالا مدخلنا على أبي محمد (ع) وهو بسر من رأى وبين يديه جماعة من أوليائه وشيعته حتى دخل عليه بدر خادمه فقال: يا مولاي بالباب قوم شمع غبر، فقال: نعم هؤلاء قوم من شيعتنا باليمن وهم... قال بدر يا مولاي هم أكثر من هذا العدد. فقال ويلك يا بدر أولئك خدامهم فامض وأت بعثمان بن سعيد العمري.}\]

Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl and ʿAlī b. ‘Abd Allāh, the two Ḥasanīs\(^{56}\) both said: We went in to Abū Muḥammad [ʿAskarī], who was at Samarra and in his presence was a group of his followers and his Shiʿa, 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 Shiʿa 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī."\(^{57}\)

In contrast to Badr, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd does not doubt the miraculous knowledge of the Imam, but instead he seems to participate in it, and the Imam is seen to name ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd directly as his *wakīl*, saying,

\[\text{امض يا عثمان، فإنك الوكيل والثقة المأمون على مال الله، واقبض من هؤلاء النفر اليمنيين ما حملوه من المال.}\]

\(^{55}\) Tūsī, *Ghayba*, 221.

\(^{56}\) Reading from Tūsī’s “al-Ḥasanīyayn”, 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.

“Go, oh ʿUthmān, for you are the wakīl entrusted with the money of God and the Shiʿa (fa-innaka al-wakīl al-thiqa al-maʾmūn ʿalā māl allāh wa al-shīʿa),” and take from those Yemeni people the money they brought.

In this report, Badr’s position is being explicitly subordinated to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. 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-maʾmūn as used in this report, makes explicit the kind of trust which was placed in ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. Here, the word “the trustworthy” (al-maʾmūn) 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, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd is depicted as collecting large sums of money from the Yemeni pilgrims. This depiction of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as “trustworthy” in the sense of the one commissioned to collect money, corroborates the sense that we see in Kashshī’s reports, 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.”

The intention to depict ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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. The

---

58 Tūsī omits the phrase “and his Shiʿa.”
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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’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 Khašībī’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 وكيلًا وقعت الشبهة في قلوبنا
وقلنا عسي أن يكون قد بدأ الله في محمد بن نصير كما بدأ له في أبي الخطاب محمد بن أبي زينب

When Our Sayyid Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b ʿAlī [al-ʿAskarī] appointed Abū ʿAmr ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿArī 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.”

In what follows, a group of believers gather and ask al-ʿAskarī 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 ونقل إليكم أنه كان بابي؟
فقلنا: بلى.

Khašībī, Hidāya, 394.
Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] (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 [ʿAlī]?

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. Saʿīd my wakīl!?"§

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 Ṭāmrīs, while ring-fencing the particular spiritual authority and mediation of Ibn Nuṣayr and the pantheon of earlier bābs.†

The canonical Twelver reports transmitted by ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, which appear in Kulaynī, Ibn Bābūya and Ṭūsī are more limited in their depiction of the activities of ‘Uthmān b. Saʿīd, and less explicit in describing his role as preeminent wakīl to the Imams than

---

§ Khaṣṣībī, Hidāya, 394-5.
† While the Hidāya remains undated, all of this suggests that these Nuṣayrī reports developed in response to the development of the authority of Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar as Envoy.
those transmitted by the Nuṣayrī Khašībī. 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 ʿAmrīs – 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 Khašībī.

We can see explicitly expressed in these reports a reason both why Nuṣayrīs might embrace the office of a preeminent wakil, 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 Khašībī’s pantheon-making perspective, and in which ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd appears explicitly as a bāb, is Ibn Rustum’s Dalāʾil al-imāma. Though this is a later source, it appears to preserve various apparently early divergences from the canonical Twelver narratives. The Dalāʾil 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd is again made explicit in the fact that, for the Eleventh Imam, Ibn Rustum lists both ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and Ibn Nuṣayr, though he adds
afterwards that ūṯmān b. saʿīd is “more correct (aṣaḥḥ).” 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 ūṯmān b. saʿīd, though a more detailed reading of the Dalāʿil 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 ūṯmān b. saʿīd 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 Noṣayr’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.” This suggests that the articulation of the role of ūṯmān b. saʿīd 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 ābū Jaʿfar, and then ibn Rawḥ in 312/924, issued statements cursing ibn Nuṣayr along with other renegades such as al-Sharīʿī and ibn Rawḥ’s erstwhile assistant al-Shalmaghānī. We may, perhaps be skeptical about how active ābū Jaʿfar 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 āmriṣ, saying,

---

67 ibn Rustum, Dalāʿil, 425.
68 Yaron Friedman, “Ebn Noṣayr,” Elr. 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.
Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr al-Namīrī was one of the companions of Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] (AS) and when Abū Muḥammad died, [Ibn Nuṣayr] claimed the place of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān, saying that he was the companion (ṣāḥib) 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 (ilḥād) and ignorance (jahl) and Abū Jaʿfar cursed him and disassociated from him.⁷⁰

This statement displays patent confusion between the role of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as primary wakīl of the Eleventh Imam, a role which is clear in the reports in the Hidāya and Kashshīʿs Rijāl, and the later role of Abū Jaʿfar 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 Ṭūsī, 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. Saʿīd, followed by the gradual canonization of Abū Jaʿfar’s authority through recourse to the glorification of his father ‘Uthmān b. Saʿīd’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 Jaʿfar as Envoy. It is hard to be more precise, but given that ‘Abd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī visited Kufa after 290/903, and died sometime afterward then it is likely that Khaṣībī’s reports about ‘Uthmān b. Saʿīd 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. Saʿīd’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 lead 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. Saʿīd’s son, Abū Jaʿfar.

6.9 Summing up the role of ‘Uthmān b. Saʿīd

In assessing the role of ‘Uthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s son, Abū Jaʿfar, means that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s role as eyewitness may not have originated with ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 Jaʿfar.

As for the reports that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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-ʿAskarī. The Nuṣayrī reports are particularly rich in depictions of his activity as a wakīl for al-ʿAskarī, 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as a wakīl were combined, apparently by ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, presumably with a view to providing a justification for the increasing importance of his father, Abū Jaʿfar, from whom ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar transmitted tawqīʿāt. 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 Jaʿfar’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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s death, and the transmission of his authority to Abū Jaʿfar is said to take place in 280/893,\(^1\) suggesting that his death must have occurred some time earlier. When discussing the authority of Abū Jaʿfar, the sources very commonly state that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd was the *wakīl* of the Eleventh Imam, and that Abū Jaʿfar was the *wakīl* of the *nāhiya*, 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd in relation to the claims of his son, Abū Jaʿfar, to preeminent authority in the Imami community. For now, suffice it to say that ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 *nāhiya* 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 Jaʿfar, that his role as an eyewitness was preserved, but before Abū Jaʿfar 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-ʿAskarī’s death.

\(^{71}\) Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 225.
Chapter 7: Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, and the establishment of the idea of Envoy, the stories of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, Ḥājīz, 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 Jaʿfar, 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 ʿAmrīs 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd’s son, Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Ḥājīz, a member of the old guard, rather than his father or any Nawbakhtī.

On the basis of our sources we may suggest that Abū Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar’s Life

Abū Jaʿfar 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd of course also dogs the origins of Abū Jaʿfar. Ṭūsī’s biography of him provides little information:
Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī, bearing the kunya Abū Jaʿfar, and his father had the kunya Abū ʿAmr. Together they were the two wakīls on behalf of the Lord of the Age (ṣāḥib al-zamān) (AS), and they both have a high station among the sect (ṭāʾifa).²

In terms of narrative evidence of the activities of Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 *Tanbih*, written in 290/903, which survives preserved in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*, analyzed above. Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar is mentioned in Kulaynī’s *Kāfī*, but very fleetingly, only being mentioned alongside ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd in the *thiqā* hadith, which itself appears to be a later addition, especially given that Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar acting as Envoy? The absence of Abū Jaʿfar 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 Shiʿi 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, Nuʿmānī. 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd and Abū Jaʿfar are mentioned, as particularly reliable witnesses and trusted servants of the Imams. Other figures

---

3 See previous chapters.
like Ḥājiz and Aḥmad b. Iṣḥāq 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 Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar in the earlier section about the twelve Imams, reported on the authority of his brother, Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī.5 Interestingly, the Hidāya is the only one of our sources to include testimony from this brother of Abū Jaʿfar. The chains of transmission indicate that Khaṣībī had directly communicated with him. Though we might expect the testimony of Aḥmad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī to be particularly favorable to his brother, in fact, this single report depicts Abū Jaʿfar as a mere witness to the miraculous activities of the nāḥiya.6 From an insider ʿAmrī perspective, then, this earliest attestation to Abū Jaʿfar 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 Envoys. These quotations from Aḥmad al-ʿAmrī appear in the chapter on the Twelfth Imam, not the final chapter on the wakīls. In the chapter on the wakīls, Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar than to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar is merely mentioned in passing as part of the pantheon of Envoys. Unfortunately, we cannot precisely date Khaṣibī’s Hidāya, though Khaṣibī does appear to have died before Ibn Bābīya wrote Kamāl al-dīn, making the Hidāya probably the earliest for the role of Abū Jaʿfar as Envoy, unless we suppose the wakīls section to have been added after Khaṣibī’s death. Nuṣayris were clearly active participants in the production of the image of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd in particular, though they wrote less about his son Abū Jaʿfar, 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.

Nuʿmāni’s Ghayba, completed in 342/953 gives the first clear mention of the canonical role of the Envoys (sufarāʾ) in defining the distinction between lesser and complete Occultation:

فأما الغيبة الأولى فهي الغيبة التي كانت السفراء فيها بين الإمام (عليه السلام) وبين الخلق قياما منصوبين ظاهرين موجودي الأشخاص والأعيان، يخرج على أيديهم غواصي العلم، ووعيود الحكم، والأجوبة عن كل ما كان يسأل عنه من المشكلات والمعضلات، وهي الغيبة القصيرة التي انقضت أيامها وتصرمت مدتها.

والغيبة الثانية هي التي ارتفع فيها أشخاص السفراء والوسائط للأمر الذي يريده 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 Khaṣibī, 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, Nuʿmānī mentions no Envoy by name, and so Nuʿmānī may have had in mind the anonymous functionaries of the nāḥiya, or figures like Ḥājiz, rather than, or as well as, the ʿAmrīs.

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 Jaʿfar as Envoy. Abū Jaʿfar’s increased importance in this work accompanies a general inflation in the stock of the Envoys as a theologically important category, following Nuʿmānī’s declaration of the role of the Envoys in defining the nature of the Occultation. In the Kamāl, Abū Jaʿfar 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, and also reports in which Abū Jaʿfar 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 support to the claim of Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar 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

\(^8\) Nuʿmānī, Ghayba, 178-9.
for the life of Abū Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar’s who clearly sought to burnish his illustrious kinsman’s image:

He is no less than Abū Nasr Hibat Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Kātib, from whose book, Akhbār Abī ʿAmr wa-Abī Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrīyayn 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 ʿAmrī’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-wukalāʾ al-arbaʿa9 by the Başran Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī 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 Jaʿfar’s descendent, Ibn Barniyya. These family narratives are notably more hagiographical than the reports transmitted by Abū Jaʿfar’s brother in the Hidāya which do not give any special role to Abū Jaʿfar.

In seeking to understand the role of Abū Jaʿfar, 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.
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 Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar, with the careful use of additional materials from Ṭūsī and others.

**7.3 Was Abū Jaʿfar a scholar?**

Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar 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 ʿAbd 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.”

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.

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. 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. 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 كتاب مصنف في الفقه مما سمعها من أبي محمد الحسن عليه السلام ، ومن الصاحب عليه السلام ، ومن أبيه عثمان بن سعيد ، وعن أبي محمد وعن أبيه علي بن محمد عليه السلام فيها كتب ترجمتها كتب الأشربة ، ذكرت الكبيرة أم كلثوم بنت أبي جعفر رضي الله عنها أنها وصلت إلى أبي القاسم الحسن بن روح رضي الله عنه عند الوصية إليه ، وكانت في يده . قال أبو نصر : وأظنها قالت وصلت بعد ذلك إلى أبي الحسن السلمي 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, Rījāl, 1-5.
12 See Takim, Heirs, 33-36.
13 Kashshī, Rījāl, 407-10.
14 See above, and Najāshī, Rījāl, 219.
al-ʿAskarī and from the Lord (al-ṣāḥib) [12th Imam] (AS) and from his [own] father ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd from Abū Muḥammad [ʿAskarī] (AS) and from his father from ʿAlī b. Muḥammad [Hādī] (AS) amongst which [books] I have glossed (tarjamtuḥā) the Books of the Drinks which the lady Umm Kulthūm bt. Abū Jaʿfar (RAA) mentioned, saying that it had been given to Ibn Rawḥ (RAA) when he was designated for succession (waṣiyya) 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)”.

This statement seems designed to affirm the scholarly credentials of Abū Jaʿfar, 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. It may be corroborated by one of the rescripts issued by Abū Jaʿfar which makes a fleeting statement about the legal status of beer and a bitter drink called shalmāb. However, if this book did exist, it had clearly not been considered a work of major scholarship, being mentioned by no others that Abū Jaʿfar’s grandson, Ibn Barniyya, and it does not seem to have survived until the time of Ṭūsī.

Tellingly the mention of Abū Jaʿfar’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 Shiʿi community. It is perhaps not surprising that the Ghayba works do make sure to mention some of Abū Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar 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,\textsuperscript{18} and two hadith in which he claims to have seen the Twelfth Imam at ritual sites of Mecca.\textsuperscript{19} Ibn Bābūya also carries a hadith from Abū Jaʿfar in which he transmits a report from the Imams affirming some key points of the doctrine of the Occultation.\textsuperscript{20} A large number of rescripts appear in our sources as having been transmitted by Abū Jaʿfar 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 ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī: \textit{Questions for Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan (AS) by the Hand of Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī}.\textsuperscript{21} This suggests that an important part of Abū Jaʿfar’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.

\textbf{7.4 The interregnum in the wakīlate and opposition to Abū Jaʿfar}

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 \textit{Tanbīḥ}, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī gives a timeline for the contact between the community and the Hidden Imam:

\begin{quote}
ثم كانت كتب ابنه الخلف بعدة تخرج إلى الشيعة بالأمر والنهي على أيدي رجال أبيه الثقات أكثر من عشرين سنة ،
ثم انقطعت المكاتبة ومنذ أكثر رجال الحسن عليه السلام الذين كانوا يشهدوا بأمر الإمام بعده وباقي منهم رجل
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} For example, \textit{Kamāl}, 430-1; 433.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibn Bābūya, \textit{Kamāl}, 440.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibn Bābūya, \textit{Kamāl}, 409, and see below.
\textsuperscript{21} Najāshī, \textit{Rijāl}, 220.
Then the letters of [ʿAskarī]’s son, the successor after him were issued to the Shiʿa 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-ʿAskarī] (AS) who had given witness to the leadership (amr) of the Imam after him passed away, and one man remained whose probity (ʿadāla) and trustworthiness (thiqā) 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-ʿAskarī’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. Isḥāq, and ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, at least as a witness to the existence of the Imam, if not necessarily participating in the financial administration of the Occultation-era nāhiya. 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 Shiʿa.” We will address this idea of a hidden wakīl below.

22 Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 93.
7.5 Ibn Mahziyār and Abū Jaʿfar’s succession to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd

When, then, did Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar was not yet established as a preeminent authority in the community, though by this time, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, Aḥmad b. Ishāq and Ḥājiz would all have died, and those who had connections to them, including al-Asadī and Abū Jaʿfar, must have already been making plans to maintain the institutions of the community.

One of the arguments by which Abū Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar’s succession to the authority of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 Jaʿfar after the death of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. 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 تفتنا في حياة...
وعن أمرنا يأمر الابن وبه يعمل ، تولاه الله ، فانتبه إلى قوله : " وعرف معاملتنا ذلك

Muḥammad b. Humām>><>
Muḥammad b. Ḥamawayh b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Rāzī told us in 280 ʿ/893

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī said that after the death of Abū ʿAmr [ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī] the following was issued to him: “And the son [Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī] may God protect him, was always our trustworthy agent (thiqa) during the lifetime of the father [ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd] … And the son commands from our command, and he acts according to it, may God befriend him…”

Here, then, Ibn Mahziyār is depicted as having vanquished his doubts, by 280/893, and lending his support to the claim of Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’s claims than those of his father. It puts forward the claim that Abū Jaʿfar 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd in the pre-Occultation period and early Occultation period, in which Abū Jaʿfar’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 Shiʿa to obey Abū Jaʿfar, as the carrier of the Imam’s own authority.

Again the word thiqa appears as a pivotal descriptor for the authority of the ʿAmrīs, though notably here Abū Jaʿfar is not the thiqa of the Eleventh Imam, but rather of the Twelfth Imam, during the lifetime of his father. This suggests that Abū Jaʿfar’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-ahmar), who died in 286/899, and the bureaucrat al-Bāqitānī. 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 Dalāʾil 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 Jaʿfar

A key fact that emerges from the various sources in their depiction of Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar in Baghdad. Given that al-Asadī appears to have been some form of designated successor to Ḥājīj, his support is particularly significant. 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 Jaʿfar, underscoring his claim to authority through his *wakīl* father. As we have seen, ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī began to transmit reports and rescripts on the authority of Abū Jaʿfar, visiting Kufa in 290/903. This all begins to build up a picture in which Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar

As we have seen, the *Dalāʾil* 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 Jaʿfar, al-Bāqiṭānī and Ishāq al-Āḥmar. As Halm notes, Ishāq al-Āḥmar was a gnostic of the Mufaḍḍal tradition, and head of the ‘Alyāʾiyya\(^{26}\) 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-Āḥmar 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-Āḥmar, 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-Bāqiṭānī, we know of an Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī al-Bāqiṭānī, an important official in the caliphal administration, a Muʿtazilite and a prominent Shi’i, who

\(^{26}\) A sect ascribing divinity to ʿAlī.

\(^{27}\) Halm, *Gnosis*, 278-9.

\(^{28}\) See Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī*, 9-10.
patronized the poet Ibn al-Rūmī as did Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī. This is presumably the same Bāqiṭānī 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 Shī’a. If it is true that this same man was acting as a bāb, as suggested in the Dalāʾīl, it is indeed noteworthy, though I have found no further evidence of his bāb-like activities. Interestingly enough, however, this same Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Bāqiṭānī is mentioned as having been present upon the death of Abū Jaʿfar, and giving his allegiance to Ibn Rawḥ along with other Shī’i notables and bureaucrats, suggesting that, whatever the rivalry between him and Abū Jaʿfar, these differences were eventually solved and Bāqiṭānī pledged his allegiance to Abū Jaʿfar in the interests of unity.

7.8.1 Aḥmad b. Hilāl al-Karkhī

In addition to the opposition of rival bābs, there was also opposition from cautious Imamis who did not accept Abū Jaʿfar’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-ʿAbartāʾī, as Jassim Hussain does) who opposed the idea that Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’s authority:

قال أبو علي بن همام: كان أحمد بن هلال من أصحاب أبي محمد عليه السلام، فاجتمعت الشيعة عن ابن عثمان بن عثمان رضي الله عنه بن نص الحسن عليه السلام في حياته، ولم ما مضى الحسن عليه السلام قالت الشيعة

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.
The community: Is there consent of Abū Ja’far Muhammad b. ʿUthmān and return to him, and he declared that the Imām was obligatory? They said: I have not heard him declare that by consensus, and I do not deny his father. As for stating that Abū Ja’far is the wakīl of the Lord of the Age 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 nāhiya, 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, which was reported by Ibn Mahziyar.
It is notable that the dissent of Aḥmad b. Hilāl, a companion of ʿAskarī, appears to have continued to be a problematic issue throughout the tenure of Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar, by blackening the reputation of those who had opposed him during his lifetime. The fact that Ibn Rawḥ circulated the statement ostracizing Ahmad b. Hilāl indicates that Ibn Rawḥ was clearly motivated to preserve the legacy of Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar’s authority was Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Bilāl, or al-Bilālī. He was an important wakīl under ʿAskarī. There is a certain inclarity 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. ʿAlī b. Bilāl, Ṭūsī, Ghuṣba, 219.
which the sources refer to when they simply say “al-Bilālī.” Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-
Bilālī must have been the son of an elder ʿAlī al-Bilālī. There is a report in which ʿAlī b. Bilāl,
presumably Abū Ṭāhir’s father, was among those to witness the Child Imam during the lifetime of Ṭāhirī:

قال جعفر بن محمد بن عبيد الفراز ، عن جماعة من الشيعة منهم علي بن بلال وأحمد بن هل ال ومحمد بن
معاوية بن حكيم والحسن بن أيوب بن نوح ... قالوا جميعا : اجتمعنا إلى أبي محمد الحسن بن علي عليه السلام
نسأله عن الحجة من بعده ، وفي مجلسه عليه السلام أربعون رجلا.

Many Shiʿa, including ʿAlī b. Bilāl, Aḥmad b. Hilāl, Muḥammad b. Muʿāwiya b. Ḥakīm,
al-Ḥasan b. Ayyūb b. Nūḥ... said together: We gathered at Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b.
ʿAlī (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 ʿAlī 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 Ṭāhirī,
for Abū Jaʿfar transmits a rescript from him, quoted by Ṣūfī.36 Either of these Ibn Bilāls might
have been the wakīl who was praised by al-ʿAskarī as “the reliable, the trustworthy” (al-thiqā al-
maʾmūn) in a rescript preserved by Kashshī, 37 thereby applying to him the same language
applied to the wakīl ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. It is possible that the father and son were confused or

35 Ṣūfī, Ghayba, 222.
36 In this rescript, Ṭāhirī affirms his support for the apparently rather spendthrift follower, ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar. Ṣūfī,
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 hadith was transmitted from Abū Ṭāhir al-Bilālī by Abū Ja‘far al-ʿAmrī.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 مضيه بسنتين يخبرني بالخلف من بعده ، ثم خرج إلي بعد مضي بثلاثة أيام يخبرني بذلك فلعن الله من جحد أولياء الله حقوقهم وحمل الناس على أكتافهم، والحمد لله كثيرا.

[A letter] was issued to me from Abū Muḥammad [al-ʿAskarī] 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’i) 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 ، وتسكب بالأموال التي كانت عنده للإمام ، وامتناعه من تسليمها ، وادعائه أنه الوكيل حتى تبرأت

الجماعة منه وعنهو ، 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 (*barāʿa*), and cursed him, and [the rescript (*tawqīʿ*)] was issued from the Lord of the Age (*ṣāḥib al-zaman*) (AS) and things that are well known.\(^\text{41}\)

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 hearkens back to the *wāqifī* *wakīl*s after the death of al-Ḵāzim, as well as the treacherous supporters of Jaʿfar who collected taxes in his name, but refused to hand them over.\(^\text{42}\) 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:

\(^\text{41}\) Tusi, *Ghayba*, 248.

\(^\text{42}\) See Chapter 4.
Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Muʿādhī (one of our companions) said:

There was a man from our companions who joined (indawā) 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar] 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar 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 عبيد الله الحسين بن علي بن سفيان البزوفري رحمه الله، قال: حدثني الشيخ أبو
القاسم الحسين بن روح رضي الله عنه قال: أختلف أصحابنا في التفويض وغيره، فغضبني إلى أبي ظاهر بن
بلاغ في أيام استقامتهم فعربه الخلاف، فقال: أخبرني فأخبرته أيامًا، فقال إلى حديثي بأسناده إلى أبي
عبد الله عليه السلام قال: إذا أراد الله عز وجل عملًا عرض على صاحب الزمان عليه السلام ثم اخرج إلى الدنيا
وسائر الأئمة [عليه السلام]، وإذا أراد الملائكة أن يرفعوا إلى الله عز وجل عملًا عرض على صاحب الزمان عليه السلام ثم اخرج إلى الدنيا
(8)
وأبأ أراد الملائكة أن يرفعوا إلى الله عز وجل عملًا عرض على صاحب الزمان عليه السلام ثم اخرج إلى الدنيا(8)
وأبأ أراد الملائكة أن يرفعوا إلى الله عز وجل عملًا عرض على صاحب الزمان عليه السلام ثم اخرج إلى الدنيا(8)
فما نزل من الله فعلي أيديهم، وما عرج إلى الله عز وجل طرفة عين.

Al-Ḥusayn b. Ṭubayd Allāh

Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Sufyān al-Bazūfarī

Al-Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim b. Rawḥ said: Our companions differed about tafwīḍ and other
things, and I went to Abū Ṭāhir b. Bilāl in the days of his uprightness (ayyām
istiqāmatihi) 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 ʿAbd 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 Ṭūsī’s Ghayba edited by ʿAbbad Allāh Ṭīhrānī and
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 tafwīḍ, 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, Ḡhayba, 241.
47 See Modarressi on tafwīḍ, Crisis, 19-51. My thanks to Rodrigo Adem for several illuminating discussions about tafwīḍ, including this passage.
complicates Abū Sahl’s idea of a break between the period of the nāhiya 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 Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar was asserting his authority in some way, and this authority was denied by members of the older generation.

7.9 The rise of Abū Jaʿfar

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 Jaʿfar, 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

435
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.  

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 *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, and another in Ibn Bābūya’s *Kamāl*. The story in the *Dalāʾil* is told by a certain Ahmad 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 أرديبيل إلى الدينور أريد الحج، وذلك بعد مضي أبي محمد الحسن بن علي (عليه السلام) بسنة، أو سنتين، وكان الناس في حيرة، فاستبشروا أهل الدينور بموافتي، واجتمع الشيعة عندي، فقالوا: قد اجتمع عدنا 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 (*hayra*). The people of al-Dīnawar welcomed my arrival, and the Shi’a

---

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 (hayra). We do not know the bāb in this time!”

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 وَدَتْ بَدَادَ لمَّا كانَ لِي هَمَّةٍ غَيرُ الْبَحْثِ عُنْمَ أَشْيَرَ إِلَيْهِ بِالْبَنِيَّةَ، فَقَالَ لَيْ: إِنَّ هَذَا رَجُلٌ يَدْعَى بِالْبَنِيَّةَ، وَأَخْرَجُ يَدْعَى بِالْبَنِيَّةَ، وَأَخْرَجُ يَدْعَى بِالْبَنِيَّةَ.

And when I reached Baghdad I had no concern but to search for the one who was indicated for the office of deputy (ʾamman 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 Ishīq al-Āḥmar claims deputyship, and another known as Abū Jaʿfar al-ʾAmrī claims deputyship.”

Again, this diverges from the more standard Twelver narratives favored by Ibn Bābūya and Ṭūsī as it places the choice of Abū Jaʿfar as deputy among a number of other candidates, notably the ghulāt claimant Ishīq al-Āḥmar who also appears to have contested authority with Ibn Nuṣayr.

---

49 Ibn Rustum, Dalāʾil, 519-20.
50 Ibn Rustum, Dalāʾil, 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: فبدأ بالباقطاني، فصرت إليه، فوجدته شيخا بحيا، له مروءة ظاهرة، وفرس عربي، وغلمان كثير، ويجتمع عنه الناس يتناظرون

He said: So I started with al-Bāqiṭānī, and I went to him, and I found him to be a handsome old man (shaykh bahī), who had an obvious chivalry of manner (murūʿa ṣāhirā), Arabian horses, and many servants, around whom were gathered people showing off (yataẓāharūna).

Al-Bāqiṭānī is asked for a proof, but is unable to produce one, and so Aḥmad from Dīnawar goes on to Ishāq al-ʿAḥmar:

قال: فصرت إلى إسحاق الأحمر، فوجدته شابا نظيفا، منزله أكبر من منزل الباقطاني، وفرسه ولباسه ومروءته أسرى، وعلمائه أكثر من علمائه، ويجتمع عنه الناس أكثر مما يجتمعون عند الباقطاني

He said: So I went to Isḥāq al-ʿAḥmar, and I found him to be a clean youth (shābb naẓīf), whose house (manzil) was larger than the house of al-Bāqiṭānī, and his horses and his clothes and his chivalry (murūʿa) 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-Bāqiṭānī.

---

52 Ibn Rustum, Dalāʾil, 520.
53 Ibn Rustum, Dalāʾil, 521.
But Isḥāq al-Aḥmar, too, is unable to provide a proof, and Aḥmad proceeds to the third possible bāb:

قال: فصرت إلى أبي جعفر العموري، فوجدته شيخًا متواضعاً، عليه مبطنة بيضاء، قاعد على لبد، في بيت صغير، ليس له غلمان، ولا له من المرحة والفرس ما وجدت لغيره. قال: فسلمت، فرد جوابي، وأدناني، وبست منه، ثم سألني عن حالي، فعرفته أبي وافيت من الجبل، وحملت للها. قال: إن أحببت أن تصل هذا الشيء إلى من يجب أن يصل إليه يجب أن تخرج إلى سر من رأي، وتسأل 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 رأي، وصرت إلى دار ابن الرضا، وسألت عن الوكيل، فذكر البواب أنه مشتغل في الدار، وأنه يخرج أنفاً، فقلت على الباب أننتظر خروجه، فخرج بعد ساعة، فقمت، ولمت عليه، وأخذ يغذي إلى بيت كان له، وسألاني عن حالي، وعما وردت له، فعرفته أبي حملت شيئاً من المال من ناحية الجبل، وأحتاج أن أسلمه بحجة. قال: قال: تعلم. ثم قدم إلى طعاماً، وقال لي: تغذى بهذا واسترح، فإنك تعب، وإن بيننا وبين صلاة الأولي ساعة، فاني أحمل إليك ما تريد. قال: فكانت وثبتت، فلمما كان وقت الصلاة نهضت وصليت، ثم ذهبت إلى المشروعة، فاغتسلت وانصرفت إلى بيت الرجل، ومكثت إلى أن مضني من الليل ربعية، فقامني (1) ومعه درج (2)، فيه: "بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، وافي أحمد بن محمد الدينو ي، وحمل ستة عشر ألف دينار، وحمل ستة عشر ألف دينار، وفي كذا وكذا صرة، فيها صرة لسان بن فلان كذا وكذا دينار، وصورة فلان بن فلان كذا وكذا دينار - إلى أن عد الصور كلها...

قال: فحمدت الله وشكرته على ما من به علي من إزالة الشك عن قلبي، وأمر بتسليم جميع ما حملته إلى بيته ما يأمركني أبو جعفر العموري. قال: فانصرفت إلى بغداد، وصرت إلى أبي جعفر العموري. قال: وكان خروجي وانصرفت في ثلاثة أيام. قال: فلما بصري أبي جعفر العموري قال لي: لم تخرج؟ فقلت: يا سيدي، من سر من رأي انصرفت. قال: فأنا أحدثت أبا جعفر بهذا إذ وردت رقعة على أبي جعفر العموري 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 العموري ثيابه، وقال لي: أحمل ما معك إلى منزل محمد
He said: then I went to Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, and I found him to be a humble old man (shaykh mutawāḍiʿ), wearing a white waist-wrapper sitting on a felt mat in a small house, with no servants, and without chivalry (murūʿa) 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 Jaʿfar] 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-ʿAskarī] and ask about fulān b. fulān 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 (ānīfan) , 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-t-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 (nāhiya) of the Jabal, and I needed to hand it over to him upon a proof (hujja).

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 (mashra’a) 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-Dīnawarī 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 Ja’far al-ʿAmrī ordered me to.

He said: So I returned to Baghdad, and I went to Abū Ja’far al-ʿAmrī.

He said: And my going out and my returning took three days.

He said: And when Abū Ja’far 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 Jaʿfar about this. Lo! a note (ruqʿa) arrived for Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī 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 Jaʿfar] should hand over all of that to Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jaʿfar al-Qaṭṭān al-Qummī. And Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī put on his clothes, and he said to me, “Carry what is with you to the house of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jaʿfar al-Qaṭṭān al-Qummī.”

He said: And I carried the money and the cloths to the house of Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jaʿfar al-Qaṭṭān, and I handed them over, and I went out on Ḥajj…

This long and rather flowery narrative is remarkable in the relationship it presents between Abū Jaʿfar 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, ʿAlī al-Riḍā: the Eleventh Imam al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. This is said to occur a couple of years after ʿAskarī’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 nāhiya 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 Jaʿfar’s instructions. Thus, this anonymous wakīl ultimately functions in this narrative to indicate the legitimacy of Abū Jaʿfar,

58 Ibn Rustum, Dalāʾ il, 521-3.
against the other potential claimants. This then seems to suggest that Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 (nāḥiya) 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 Jaʿfar built support for his authority. While the existence of an anonymous wakīl in Samarra legitimates Abū Jaʿfar, Abū Jaʿfar provides financial support in the Imam’s name to another regional wakīl, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar, and Abū Jaʿfar needed an anonymous wakil in Samarra.

This report of the hidden wakil, then, fills in a number of gaps in our understanding of how Abū Jaʿfar attained authority. As we have seen, he was from a younger generation of bābs or wakils, 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 Dalāʾil, suggests that it may preserve something that was lost from more canonical sources, for the Dalāʾil 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, and therefore can be expected to preserve alternative perspectives which can be useful in assessing the canonical narrative.

This unusual report in Dalāʾil 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 wakil, as this report indicates that ‘The Wakil’ was not Abū Jaʿfar himself, but rather someone based in Samarra with whom Abū Jaʿfar maintained contact. Significantly, though, in this report the ultimate destination of the money was not Samarra but Baghdad. Abū Jaʿfar is seen as the first stop for delivering the money, and he then redistributes it to the loyal Qummī wakil 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 Jaʿfar 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-ʿAskarī. This

---

60 See, for example, its Nuṣayrī-style pantheon-making with a bāb named for each Imam, and its mention of Ibn Nuṣayr alongside ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. See above, Chapter 5.
corresponds, again, with the idea presented in Tanbīḥ of an old guard of associates of al-ʿAskarī 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 nāhiya which dispels his doubts over which is the correct recipient of the money, whether the nāhiya or Jaʿfar ‘the Liar.’ The note instructs him to then go back to Baghdad and pay the money to Ḥājiz.61

This report in the Dalāʾil 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 Shiʿi 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 Shiʿi 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 Ḥanẓa al-Ṭūsī, al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib, edited by Nabīl Riḍā ʿUlwān (Qumm: Muʿassisat Anṣāriyān, 1411 AH [1990-1 CE]), 594-6. This also echoes the interactions that occur between Abū Jaʿfar Jaʿfar 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”.

445
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 الإمام 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 (iftāʾ) 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. Ishāq. However, as the Dalāʾil indicates, the idea of the hidden wakīl appears to have been utilized by Abū Jaʿfar 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 Dalāʾil, 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 Dalāʾil allows us to fill in the details left by the obscure comments made in Tanbīh, the chronology remains somewhat confused. According to the Dalāʾil, 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 Dalāʾil 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 Dalāʾil, 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 Jaʿfar

As we have mentioned, the names of the old guard are fairly well known: Ḥājiz, Aḥmad b. Ishāq, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 nāhiya, it could not easily be dislodged, given that it was the capital of the caliphal state once more, close to Shiʿi communities in Baghdad and Iraq, and the center of the theological heart of the Shiʿi 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar. This gives us a clear indication that al-Asadī was in direct communication with Abū Jaʿfar, and able, therefore, to preserve written documents issued by him. We will deal with the rescripts in detail below.

Certainly Abū Jaʿfar replicates some of the features of the nāhiya which Ḥājiz established upon his repudiation of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar.’ Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar is mentioned in connection with Samarra. In this report, Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’s transition to authority

Abū Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar objected to, and which Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 underestimates 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 belief that the Twelfth Imam had died, and his son or descendent was the Qāʾim-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 Jaʿfar
While it is difficult to ascertain the historical circumstances of the rise of Abū Jaʿfar, we do at least have a number of hadith that purport to have been transmitted by Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar: those upon his own authority,

⁶⁶ Klemm, "Sufarāʾ" 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: سنل أبو محمد الحسن بن علي عليه السلام وأنا عنده عن
الخبر الذي روي عن آبائه عليهم السلام: "أن الأرض لا تخلو من حجة لله على خلقه إلّى يوم القيامة وأن من 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 الإمام والحبة بعدي، من مات ولم يعرفه مات ميَتة
جاهلية. أما إن له غيبة يحار فيها الجاهلون، ويبلغ فيها المبطلون، ويكتب فيها الوقاتن، ثم يخرج فكأن أنظر
إلى الأعلام البيض تخفق فوق رأسه بنجف الكوفة.

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq (RAA)

Abū Ṭﺍlī b. Humām

67 See, for example, Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 435; 440.
68 Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 217.
Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī (QAR) said: I heard my father [ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd] say: Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī [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 Kūfā.69

In this report, then, Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 (tawqīʿāt)

A key resource for assessing Abū Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, 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-ʿAskarī 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

⁷⁰Compare 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 Chiliasm to quietism following after the perplexity of the early Occultation period gives way to ‘the consolation of theology,’ “Consolation,” 548-71.

⁷¹See Chapter 6 for the question of handwriting with reference to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd. 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.

⁷²See, 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar corpus as an object of study.

Returning to the testimony of the Abū Tanbīḥ, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī claims in 290/903 that the letters of the Hidden Child Imam “were issued to the Shiʿa 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-ʿAskarī’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 Tanbīḥ, in 290/903, the rescripts of Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar? 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 Jaʿfar did indeed maintain contact with a hidden wakīl based in Samarra, Abū Jaʿfar 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 Ḫājiz, and other member of the old guard, thus demonstrating institutional continuity. The bābī context suggested by the rivalry between Ishāq al-Aḥmar and Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar ‘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 Jaʿfar ‘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 Jaʿfar 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 *masāʾil*, including matters of great significance such as the status of the counter-Imam, the Eleventh Imam’s brother, Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’, and the illicitness of drinking barley beer.75 Arjomand dates the rescript to after the time when Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ died and was succeeded by his son, ʿAlī, in 281/894-95, because the rescript mentions “the way of my uncle Jaʿfar and his sons” seeming to suggest that Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar was supposed to have transmitted from his father and the Imams.
sons. 281/894-95 is the date suggested by Modarressi for the death of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar.’ However, there are a number of difficulties and contradictions with this dating. Firstly, the mention of Jaʿfar and his sons does not clearly establish the death of Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar or not. Unless further evidence emerges, we will assume it to date from Abū Jaʿfar’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. ṬAlī b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī, God will fix his heart and remove doubt from it.” Notably, however, the name here is Muḥammad b. ṬAlī, 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. ṬAlī continued to doubt after

---

Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm had already pledged his support to Abū Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar’s death in 305/917. This is contradicted by the rescript transmitted from Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār himself in which he acknowledges Abū Jaʿfar’s succession to ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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, Ishāq, 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar and that of his successor, Ibn Rawḥ.

This rescript is clearly directed at establishing boundaries in the community:

---

78 See Ṣūsī, Ghayba, 225, and discussion above.
Ishqāq b. Yaʿqūb said: I asked Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī to send a letter for me in which I asked about questions (masāʾil) 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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar.’ It is notable this addresses a number of the family of the prophet:

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 [Jaʿfar ‘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 Jaʿfar ‘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 Jaʿfar 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 (ḥujja) 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 (ḥujja) to you, and I am God's Proof (ḥujja) to them.”83

وأما محمد بن عثمان العمري - رضي الله عنه وعن أبيه من قبل - فإنه ثقتي وكتابتي

And as for [Abū Jaʿfar] Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī (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.
But Abū al-Khaṭṭāb Muḥammad b. Abī Zaynab al-Ajdāʿ and his followers, they are cursed. So do not sit with the spokesmen (ahl) of their claims. My forefathers and I are disassociated (barīʾ) 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 Qāʾīm, to return and fill the world with justice, though they differed over who this Qāʾīm 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.”\(^8\) This echoes the hadith of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq quoted in Chapter 3, emphasizing the ritual function of the canonical taxes to cleanse their donors,\(^8\) 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.”\(^8\)

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.

\(^8\) Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 484.
\(^8\) Ritual purity related to the canonical taxes is emphasized in several other clauses in the rescript.
\(^8\) Ibn Bābūya, *Kamāl*, 485.
In the following quotation, a more specific statement is made about the *khums* category of canonical tax:

وأما الخمس فقد أبيح لشيعتنا وجعلوا منه في حل إلى وقت ظهوِّر أمرنا للتطيب 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 (*juʿilū fī ḥillin minhu ilā waqt zuhūr 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 Jaʿfar’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 *nāhiya* 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’s rescript also attests directly to the difficulty of extracting money from the Shiʿi 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 Hādī.
time of Abū Jaʿfar, and at this time, people in the Shiʿi 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-
amwālinā) 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 Jaʿfar’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 appropriate 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar in
response to a set of questions from none other than Ḥājīz’s successor, Abū al-Ḥusayn
Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Asādī. 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 nāhiya:

وأما ما سألت عنه من أمر الوقف على ناحيتنا وما يجعل لنا ثم يحتاج إليه صاحبه ، فكلما لم يسلم فصاحبه فيه بالخير ، وكلما سلم فلا خيار فيه لصاحبه ، احتاج إليه صاحبه أو لم يحتاج ، افترض إليه أو استغني 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 لسانه وليسان كلنبي" . فمن ظلمنا كان من جملة الظالمين ، وكان لعنة الله عليه لقوله تعالى : " آلا لعنة الله على الظالمين ."

And as for what you asked about regarding the case of waqf endowment to our nāhiya, 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 (harrama) 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 Jaʿfar ‘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 executers of the endowments had ceased to pay out. Here then, Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar 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 nāḥiyya, this time in an interesting case of direct inspiration, rather than just taking the word of Abū Jaʿfar:

 حدثنا أبو جعفر محمد بن محمد الخزاعي رضي الله عنه قال : حدثنا أبو علي ابن أبي الحسين الأسدی ، 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 دِهما " قال أبو الحسين الأسدی رضي الله عنه : فوقع في نفسي أن ذلك فين استحل من مال الناحية دِهما دون من أكل منه غير مستحل له . وقلت في نفسي : إن ذلك في جميع من استحل محرما ، فأي فضل في ذلك للحجة عليه السلام على غيره ؟ قال : فوالتى بعث محمدًا بالحق بشيرًا لقد نظرت بعد ذلك في التوقيع فوجئته قد انقلب إلى ما وقع في نفسي : " بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لعنة الله والملائكة والناس أجمعين على من استحل من مالنا دِهما " قال أبو جعفر محمد بن محمد الخزاعي : أخرج إلينا أبو علي بن أبي الحسين الأسدی هذا التوقيع حتى نظرنا إليه وقرأناه.

Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Khuzāʿī
Abū ʿAlī b. Abī al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī

His father [Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Asadī]

A rescript (tawqīʿ) from the Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī 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 (waqaʿa ʿa fī nafsī) 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 mustaḥallīn 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 fi dhālik li-al-ḥujja (AS)ʿalā 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 (harām) dirham from our property.”

Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Khuzāʿī said: Abū ʿAlī 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 nāhiya. 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 nāhiya restating the old hadith, and it takes a direct, supernatural intervention, from the Imam to show that the money of the nāhiya 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 nāhiya 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. ʿAbd Allāh, a certain ‘Shaykh’ Abū ʿAbd 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 nāhiya, named al-Maythamī and al-Mukhtār, and the followers of Ja’far ‘the Liar’:

A rescript from the Lord of the Age (ṣāhib al-zamān) (AS) which was issued to al-ʿAmrī and his son (RAA) which was transmitted by Sa’d b. ʿAbd Allāh [al-Qummī]:

The Shaykh Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ja’far (RAA) said: I found it written down (mithbat) from him [al-ʿAmrī?] (may God have mercy upon him)… It has reached us what you both [i.e. both ʿAmrīs] 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. ʿAlī ['the Liar’], and [al-Mukhtār’s] correction of him (taṣdīqihi iyyāhu).

---

98 Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 510-11.
This, then, purports to refer to debates that took place during the lifetime of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 Jaʿfar ‘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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar. 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 مَموِا؟ أو لم يعلموا انظام أئمتهم بعد نبيهم صلى الله عليه وآله واحدا بعد واحد إلى أن أفضى الامر بأمر الله عز وجل إلى الماضي يعني الحسن بن علي عليه السلام - فقام مقام أبيه عليه السلام بهدي إلى الحق وإلى طريق مستقيم ... ثم اختار الله عز وجل له ما عنده فمضى على منهاج أبيه عليه السلام ... ووصية أوصى بها إلى وصي ستره الله عز وجل بأمره

[Do not the followers of Jaʿfar] know that the world is never empty of a Proof (hujja) whether visible (ḥujja) or hidden (maghmūr)?

And don't they know about the order (intiṣām) 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. ʿAlī [al-ʿAskarī] (AS), and he stood in the place of his forefathers (AS) (qāma maqām ābāʾ 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…

The two major doctrinal elements here, then, are the continuous existence of a prophet or Imam (*ḥujja*), through a continuous, unbroken succession of spiritual inheritance (*waṣiyya*). The report highlights the fact that the followers of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ are wrong, and that, indeed, there is an alternative successor to Jaʿfar ‘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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar 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 ʿAmrī who recited this prayer to the transmitter, Abū ʿAlī b. Humām, but given that other early Occultation narratives transmitted by Abū ʿAlī b. Humām are all transmitted from Abū Jaʿfar, we can assume that this was from Abū Jaʿfar:

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. 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 Jaʿfar and the mechanisms of authority

In addition to giving us a sense of the doctrinal positions of the nāhiya, the rescripts of Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’s bid for support was initially secret, identifying supporters one by one, rather than making public claims to the Shiʿi community at large.

 حدثنا أبي رضي الله عنه ، عن سعد بن عبد الله قال : حدثني أبو علي المتيلي قال : جاءني أبو جعفر فمضى بي إلى العباسيّة وأدخلني خربة وأخرج كتابا فقرأه علي فإذا فيه شرح جميع ما حدث على الدار وفيه "أن فلانة - يعني أم عبد الله - تأخذ بشعرها وتخرج من الدار ويجتر 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 [ʿAlī Ibn Bābūya] (RAA)

Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī

Abū ʿAlī al-Mattīlī said: Abū Jaʿfar came to me and passed with me to al-ʿAbbāsiyya and made me enter a ruin (khirba) and brought out a letter and read it to me, and lo! In it

---

101 Al-ʿAbbāsiyya 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] (ʿalā al-dār).  

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 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 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 Ḥusayn, who is elsewhere compared to the legatee (waṣī) of Ḥusayn after his martyrdom.  

Once Ibn Mattīl has read the letter, Abū Jaʿfar then commands him: “‘Memorize!’ Then he tore up the letter. And that was a little while before the event happened.” 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 Ḥusayn, perhaps the bitterest moment of the dispute with Jaʿfar. If this were the case, this would place this meeting during the lives of the old guard, suggesting, again that Abū Jaʿfar was beginning to build up support before the deaths of the old guard. The circumstances of this communication suggest that Abū Jaʿfar established communications with Ibn Mattīl secretly. Ibn Mattīl was clearly an important supporter of Abū Jaʿfar, who later expected to succeed him as Envoy, though was displaced by Ibn Rawḥ.  

The meeting takes place in Baghdad, the letter is issued by Abū Jaʿfar 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-Asadi’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-Asadi’s waqf rescript, 106 mentioned above, presents a distinctive image of the relationship between Abū Ja’far and al-Asadi 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-Asadi supplemented the rescript from the nāḥiya with his own inspired interpretation gives a sense of the way in which al-Asadi 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-Asadi 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-Asadi’s visionary adjustment to the hadith. This gives a potent example of al-Asadi’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 Jaʿfar 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 nāhiya of Abū Jaʿfar, 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 nāhiya, and also the mechanisms by which Abū Jaʿfar and others attempted to address these challenges. The challenges faced by the nāhiya, 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 wakils, 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 Jaʿfar appears to have met the problem of non-payment of canonical taxes and waqf income to the nāhiya was to reassert the soteriological gravity of the sacred economy focused upon the Imam, now represented by the nāhiya, 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 nāhiya without criminalizing non-payment and thereby forcing the issue and potentially alienating followers.

7.11.4 Abū Jaʿfar 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:

مضي 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 شيئا من أمر الإمام

[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 Jaʿfar, but it certainly continued to be associated with the era of his authority. Even before Abū Jaʿfar, 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,  ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī is prompted to ask Abū ʿAmr (ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī) about

---

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.”

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. 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 Jaʿfar, is clear that he too disseminated reports that established this principle, for example the following report, quoted in Ţūsī’s Ghayba:

عن علي بن صدقة القمي رحمه الله قال : خرج إلى محمد بن عثمان العمري ضي الله عنه ابتداء من غير مسألة ليخبر الذين يسألون عن الاسم : إما السكوت والجنة ، وإما الكلام والناِ ، 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. Ṭhmān 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 Jaʿfar ‘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 ʿAskarī 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-ʿAskarī’s son.¹¹⁴

In another variant of this kind of strategic silence, as we have noted, Abū Jaʿfar 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, Kāfī, 1: 514.
¹¹⁴ This is recorded by Ibn al-Nadīm, See Klemm, “Sufārā” 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.”

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:

Abū Muḥammad ʿAmmār b. al-Ḥusayn b. Ishāq al-Asrawshānī (?)

Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. al-Khiḍr b. Abī Ṣāliḥ al-Khuǰandī (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 (talab) 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 (talab) and returned.

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 nāḥiyya 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.\footnote{118}

7.12 Death of Abū Jaʿfar

Ṭūsī gives two separate dates for the death of Abū Jaʿfar both of which are transmitted by Ibn Barniyya, one in at the end of Jumādā al-ūlā, in the year 305,\footnote{119} and the other in 304:

Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad [Ibn Barniyya] mentioned that Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī (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 (tawqīʿāt) were issued to him in the handwriting which would issue during the lifetime of al-Ḥasan [al-ʿAskarī] (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).\footnote{120}

---

\footnote{118}{See Amir-Moezzi, \textit{Divine Guide}, 105-6.}
\footnote{119}{Tusi, \textit{Ghayba}, 227-8.}
\footnote{120}{Tusi, \textit{Ghayba}, 228.}
This represents the canonized image of Abū Jaʿfar 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 wakil 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd as the first Envoy after the death of the Eleventh Imam, nor the testimony of Abū Sahl suggesting that Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar was contested. 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 Jaʿfar died, his position as Envoy was well established, to the extent that, at least among the Baghdadi wakils, the position of Envoy was expected to be perpetuated. In spite of the existence of alternative candidates, Abū Jaʿfar’s successor was to be a member of the prominent Nawbakhtī family:

121 Thus, we are told that many believed that Ibn Mattīl was destined to succeed Abū Jaʿfar. Ėṣf, Ghayba, 229. In another report, Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī is asked why he did not succeed to authority after Abū Jaʿfar. Ėṣf, Ghayba, 243. There are various other reports justifying the fact that Ibn Rawḥ did, indeed succeed to authority, and with Abū Jaʿfar’s explicit approval and designation, which suggest that this succession was not a foregone conclusion, but had to be argued for. Ėṣf, Ghayba, 229-232.
Abū Muḥammad Hārūn b. Mūsā

Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Humām (RAAWA) informed me that Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī (QAR) gathered us before his death, we being the prominent members and wise old men of the Shiʿa (wujūh al-shīʿa 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.”

The appointment of Ibn Rawḥ to the Envoyship united and cemented various strands of the fragmented Imami community. Ibn Rawḥ had links to Qumm, to the Baghdadi wakīls through his apprenticeship to Abū Jaʿfar 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. 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 Jaʿfar’s career

The Lesser Occultation, as a conceptual category established around 950 by Nuʿmānī, is intimately bound up with the attempt of Abū Jaʿfar 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 Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 231.
123 See Klemm, “Sufarāʾ,” 142.
124 Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 229-231.
125 See Klemm, “Sufarāʾ,” 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 Shiʿi communities to the Imam through direct physical interaction with his appointed agents who carried money, letters and gifts. Abū Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’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 Jaʿfar and his tenure is contradictory and shows clear
evidence of later redaction and elaboration. Even though it seems clear that Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 nāḥiyya in particular, and also the tenure of Abū Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar’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 Envoys once established, for it barely survived his death. This chapter, then focuses on the final rise and fall of the office of Envoys.

While Abū Jaʿfar consolidated the developments of the earlier generation into a single position, recognizable as that of Envoys (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 Envoys that we may regard it to have become institutionalized. At that moment the distinctive achievements of Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Envoys 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 Envoys came to be canonized through the preservation of the knowledge about Abū Jaʿfar 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 Envoys,
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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, and later between Ishāq al-Aḥmar and Abū Jaʿfar. 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 Jaʿfar

While Klemm questions the historicity of Abū Jaʿfar’s Envoyship,2 one of the clear indications of the historicity of Abū Jaʿfar’s preeminence was the existence of a contested succession process upon the death of Abū Jaʿfar. Most of the Shiʿa appear to have expected the Envoyship to pass to Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad b. Mattīl. According to Ibn Mattīl, he was far closer to Abū Jaʿfar than Ibn Rawḥ, indeed, Ibn Rawḥ was the least favored of the ten men whom Abū Jaʿfar 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 أئناس وأبو القاسم بن روح رضي الله عنه فيهم، وكلهم كانوا أخص به من أبي القاسم بن

---

Ja‘far b. ʿAlī b. Abī 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.\(^6\)

---

\(^3\) Āfifi, *Ghayba*, 229.

\(^4\) Āfifi, *Ghayba*, 231.

\(^5\) Āfifi, *Ghayba*, 243.

\(^6\) Āfifi, *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. 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, or simply a group of men (jamā‘a) 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
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 Jaʿfar 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 Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar, and probably also, the canonization of ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Humām is featured prominently as a transmitter of hadiths broadcasting the succession of Abū Jaʿfar after ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, 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 Jaʿfar’s daughter, Umm Kulthūm, on the mechanisms of naṣṣ and wasṭiya in designating Ibn Rawḥ.

\(^{11}\) The transmitters who report on the life of Abū Jaʿfar in Ibn Bābūya’s Kamāl and Ṭūsī’s Ghayba are Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Jaʿfar al-Asadī, who we have discussed, Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Humām who was among the “prominent men of the Shiʿa” present at the death of Abū Jaʿfar (Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 231), Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Aswad who carried waqf money to Abū Jaʿfar (Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 501-2), Ishāq b. Yaʿqūb who is probably a Rāzī transmitter perhaps the brother of Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī, as he appears in the same isnād as Kulaynī (Kamāl, 483), ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Mattīl a relative of the Qummī wakīl who was expected to succeed Abū Jaʿfar as Envoy (Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 498; 503-505).
the succession of Envoys. 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 nāhiya, 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 305/917 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. 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 Jaʿfar. Ibn Rawḥ was clearly supported by some important Shiʿis, including Umm Kulthūm, the daughter of Abū Jaʿfar, who attests to his closeness to Ibn Rawḥ, 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 Jaʿfar and after. 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 Jaʿfar,

---

12 Tusi, Ghayba, 248. This hadith is quoted in full above.
13 See Tusi, Ghayba, 227-8 for Abū Jaʿfar’s death date of 304, and Ibn Rawḥ’s death in 326, Tūsī, Ghayba, 241.
14 Massignon, Passion, 1: 317-319.
15 Tūsī, Ghayba, 231.
16 Ibn Bābūya, Kamāl, 501-2.
17 Tūsī, Ghayba, 231-2.
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 Shiʿa gave him, such as the Furāṭ clan and others due to his high station and his position and his elevated status amongst them.\(^\text{18}\)

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.”\(^\text{19}\) 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 Jaʿfar 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 Shiʿi vizier, Ibn Muqla led to the execution of his rival, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shalmaghānī.\(^\text{20}\)

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 Qarmāṭī threat lead to the execution of Shiʿi Vizier, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Furāṭ, the new Sunnī Khāqānid Vizier imprisoned Ibn Rawḥ.

---

18 Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 231.
19 Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 239-40.
20 Massigon, 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-thood 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 Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī had stepped into a position of mediation between the community and an absent Imam that drew upon two traditions in Imami Shiʿism: 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 *Dalāʾil* indicates, Abū Jaʿfar was seen as one choice among three claimants to be the *bāb* of the age, including Ishāq al-Ĥmar and al-Baqitānī. The two traditions of wakīlate and *bāb*-hood aided the practical establishment of the power for Abū Jaʿfar, 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 ʿAmr and Abū Jaʿfar the Two ʿAmrīs*, which formed the basis for Ibn Nūḥ al-Sīrāfī’s *Book of the Reports of the Four Wakīls.* 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 flipsides of the same coin. Firstly, because some of those depicted in the chapter on the censured *bāhs* do not seem to be *bāhs* in the *ghulāt* sense, but merely moderate opponents to the *wakīls* of the *nāḥiya,* 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, “*Sufarāʾ,*” 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 (saﬁr) 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 bāb: 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 bāb 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-Nawbakhti, 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

succeed Ibn Rawḥ. He was well connected with the court and initially an ally of Ibn Rawḥ. Both Shalmaghānī and Ibn Rawḥ were supported by the vizieral family of Ibn al-Furāt. 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. However, the kind of knowledge and mediation Shalmaghānī ultimately claimed was unacceptable to the powerbrokers of the Shiʿi 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 Shiʿi vizier Ibn Muqla, an ally of Ibn Rawḥ, and one of the last viziers of the more-or-less independent Baghdad Caliphate, before the Amirate of Ibn Rāʾiq. Ibn Rawḥ died four years later in 326/938. Shalmaghānī is famously quoted by Ṭūsī as having mentioned his conflict with Ibn Rawḥ for leadership of the Shiʿi community in the following terms: “We contended over this matter as dogs squabble over a corpse.” 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.
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 Ṣāliḥ’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.

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 ilḥād, 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 Envoys

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, Khaṣḥībī preserves an alternative picture of the dissent
among the community:

و أوصى أبو جعفر بن عثمان العمري إإي أبي القاسم الحسين بن زوج النوبختي و سلم إليه وصيته فلمز الشيعة

قبول ذلك لأن محمد بن عثمان ثقة الإمام ولم يوثق إلا من هو ثقة عند الله وعنه

Abū Ja’far Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī 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. ʿUthmān was

38 Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 243.
39 Ṭūsī, Ghayba, 256-7.
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 Jaʿfar’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 ِوح 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 قطاب الشيعة على بن محمد السمري بما طالب به الحسين بن روح فذكر أوصى به عجز عن ذلك.

And al-Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī appointed Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī to succeed him, and the Shiʿa 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. ʿUthmān appointed [Ibn Rawḥ] to succeed to him." And the Shiʿa cross-examined (*ṭālaba*) ʿAlī 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 Shiʿa tested ʿAlī 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 Shiʿa 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

\(^{41}\) Khaṣṣībī, *Hidaya*, 394-5.

\(^{42}\) Ṭūsī, *Ghayba*, 243.
considered more suitable to lead. This kind of test of knowledge was also the same mechanism that Qummi scholars had used to exclude the brother of the Eleventh Imam, Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’ from the Imamate. Thus Samuri 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-Samuri is great when we consider that ultimately, the real successors to authority in the Imami community were. Throughout the tenure of Abū Jaʿfar, 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 Qummi and Razi like Ibn Bābūya and al-Nuʿmāni in the fourth/tenth century, and later Baghdadis, especially al-Shaykh al-Mufid, and his students, the Sayyid dynasts al-Sharif al-Radī and al-Murtada 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 Shiʿism.

Thus, by the time Samuri succeeded, the Envoyship was doomed. There are few activities mentioned for him, and the report of his succession is a stereotyped statement of nass designation without any of the historical details surrounding the succession of Ibn Rawḥa
We may even question whether he even was an Envoy in the sense of Abū Jaʿfar 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:

Abū Muḥammad Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Mukattib said:

I was in Baghdad in the year when the Shaykh ʿAlī 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 ʿAlī 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 tuwṣī) to anyone to take your place after your death, for the second Occultation has occurred. And there will be no appearance (zuḥūr) except after God has permitted, and that will be after a long time (ṭūl al-amad), and hardening of hearts, and the filling of the world with oppression. And to

---

43 Ṭūṣī, Ghayba, 245.
my Shi’ʿa 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 (kadhdhāb 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 (waṣṭi) after you?” And he said “God has an affair (amr) which he himself achieves (huwa bālighuhu).” And he died (RA) and these were the last words heard from him.⁴⁴

The focus on liars evokes earlier memories of Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’, statements about the opposition to Abū Jaʿfar, 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 ṣāḥ, as Shalmaghānī had proven.

Not all Shiʿa accepted the end Envoyship and ṣāḥ-hood, however. In Ṭūsī’s chapter on “the Censured ones who claimed ṣāḥ-hood,” he mentions the case of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, the nephew of Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī and Abū Dulaḍ ‘the Madman’ who made a bid for the Envoyship in his name. This, however, was refuted by the elite of the Shiʿa:

أخبرني الشيخ أبو عبد الله محمد بن محمد بن النعمان ، عن أبي الحسن علي بن بلال المهلي قال : سمعت أبا القاسم
جعفر بن محمد بن قولويه يقول : أما أبو دلف الكاتب - لا حاطه الله - فكانا نعرفه محددا ثم أظهر الغلو ، ثم جن
وسلسل ، ثم صار مفوضا
فلما دخل بغداد مال إليه وعدل عن الطائفة وأوصى إليه ، لم نشك أنه على مذهبه ، ففعناه وبرنا منه لأن عدنا أن
كل من ادعى الأمر بعد السمري رحمه الله فهو كافر منمس ضال مضل ، وبالله التوفيق

⁴⁴Ṭūsī, 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 (ilḥād) then he betrayed ghulūww, then he went mad … then he became a delegationist (mufawwid) … 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…

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 Shiʿa, 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-ʿAmrī, 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 Ṭūsī, 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 الأمر الذي حكي فيه من النيابة أنكر ذلك وقال: ليس إلي من هذا شيء، وعرض عليه مال فأبى وقال: محرم علي أخذ شيء منه، فإنه ليس إلي من هذا الأمر شيء، ولا ادعيت شيئا من هذا، وكانت حاضراً لمخاطبته إليه 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] 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.

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-jamāʿa*) appears to refer to a specific body of notables among the Shi’a.

47 Ṭūsī, *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 Jaʿfar, 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 Samuʿrī’s knowledge was tested, and that he could not continue to gather money.48

Following al-Samuʿrī’s rescript in which the “second Occultation was announced,” this step was formally written into doctrine by Nuʿmānī 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 Qāʾim.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 Nuʿmānī’s doctrine of two Occultations, then was precedent, but this time it came to be canonized, the basis of all future articulations of the subject of the Occultation.

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, *waṣiyya*). 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 Ḥājīz, 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 Shiʿi 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. Ḥājīz, who turned away from Jaʿfar, 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 Jaʿfar 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 ʿAskarī had asserted the existence of a child born to ʿAskarī, and hidden after his birth. She is also associated with rumors about one of ʿAskarī’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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar,’ opposed by the Jaʿfarites who had to accept the old Faṭḥite doctrine of the permissibility of the transmission of the Imamate between two brothers. However, some wakīls were the close followers of ʿAskarī, in particular Ṭūthmān b. Saʿīd, had probably already burnt their bridges with Jaʿfar during the lifetime of ʿAskarī, who had had a bitter rivalry with his brother. Instead, then, they fought to maintain the institutions of ʿAskarī, in the name of the Hidden Child Imam. At some stage, the idea of a posthumous pregnancy was

51 Kashshī reports that al-ʿAmrī (presumably Ṭūthmān b. Saʿīd) was involved in cursing Fāris b. Ḥātim, the supporter of Jaʿfar ‘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-
ʿAskaẓī 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 Jaʿfar ‘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 Ḥāji al-Washshā’ prime among them. ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd 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 Jaʿfar al-ʿAmrī, 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 ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, but there are no reports surviving which mention ʿUthmān b.
Saʿīd as issuing statements or collecting money during the Occultation period. This leaves us with Aḥmad b. Ishāq, a Qummī, and Ḥājiz al-Washshāʾ, 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 (waṣiyya) from the Eleventh Imam to
ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd, the great wakīl of the pre-Occultation era, and then from ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd to his son. This process of succession through designation was then repeated at the death of Abū Jaʿfar 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 Ḥājīz and the Qummī Aḥmad b. Iḥāq. Under Ibn Rawḥ, the Envoys came out of the shadows, and he had significant interactions with court figures, including influential Shiʿi bureaucrats and governors. After Ibn Rawḥ, however, though he appointed a successor, the Envoys fell into abeyance. Part of the reason for the ending of the Envoys 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 Jaʿfar ‘the Liar’. Another major reason was the shock to the institution of the Envoys 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 Shiʿa notables who had given their imprimatur to the succession of Abū Jaʿfar 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 tawqīʿ rescript, predicting al-Samurī’s imminent death, and the permanent cessation of the Envoys.
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 Shiʿi 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.
Bibliography

Sources


_______. *Rijāl*. Qum: Muʿassasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq, 1430 H [2008 or 2009].

514


——. *Al-Tawḥīd*. Tehran: Chāpkhān-yi Ḥaydarī, 1387 H [1967].


Ibn Kathīr. *Al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya*. Cairo, 1932


Khaṣībī, al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān. *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*. Diyar ’Aql [Lebanon]: Dār li-ajl al-

______. *Rasa’il al-ḥikma al-ʿalawiyya*. Diyar ’Aql [Lebanon]: Dār li-ajl al-
ma’rifa, 2006.

Khazzāz al-Rāzi al-Qummi, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, *Kifāyat al-athar fī al-nuṣūṣ ʿalā al-
imma al-ithnay ʿashar*. [Qum]: Intishārāt ba’ydar, 1401 H [1980].

Kirmānī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh. *Master of the Age: an Islamic Treatise on the

Kulaynī, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb. *Al-Kāfī*. Tehran: Dār al-


2004.


www.almarkaz.net

Riḍā, 1404 H [1983 or 1984].

Māzandarānī, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ. *Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī*, edited by ‘Alī ʿĀshūr, Beirut: Dār iḥyā’ al-


517


Studies


www.ansari.kateban.com


______. “Khums in Imāmī Shīʿī Jurisprudence, from the Tenth to the Sixteenth Century A.D.”


Cook, Michael. Commanding the Good and Forbidding the Wrong in Islamic Thought.


______. The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism.


______. *Ibn Al-Qaddah (the alleged founder of Ismailism)*. Bombay: Ismaili Society, 1957.


______. “Authority in Twelver Shiʿism in the Absence of the Imam.” in *La notion d’autorite au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident: Colloques internationaux de La Napoule, session*


