

Hisham ibn al-Hakam: Arch-Heretic?

ALEXANDER HAINY KHALEELI

The Islamic College, London, UK

ABSTRACT: Hisham ibn al-Hakam is an iconic figure in the development of Twelver Shi'ism. In classical Shi'a sources, he is a loyal disciple of the Imams Ja'far al-Sadiq and Musa al-Kazim. An avid polemicist, he is credited with being one of the earliest Shi'a *mutakallimin* and the first to introduce the subject of the imamate to theological debates. In non-Shi'a sources, he is the arch-heretic; the source of all of the Shi'a's erroneous beliefs. An interesting ascription to him is belief in anthropomorphism (*tajsim*), which appears in heresiographical works and has been uncritically repeated by modern scholars. This paper sets out to challenge the origins of this ascription and – against a broader backdrop of intra-Shi'a criticism of Hisham – explore what this tells us about the relative importance he enjoys in shaping Shi'ism.

KEYWORDS: anthropomorphism (*tajsim*); Hisham ibn al-Hakam; *kalam*; *'ilm al-rijal*; early Shi'ism.

Introduction

Hisham ibn al-Hakam is overwhelmingly portrayed by the Shi'a biographical literature as a close companion, loyal disciple, and outstanding student of Ja'far al-Sadiq and Musa al-Kazim. An avid polemicist, he is credited with being one of the earliest Shi'a *mutakallimin* (theologians) and the first to introduce the subject of the imamate to theological debates. By the time of his death, he had a substantial following. However, he is portrayed in non-Shi'a sources as an arch-heretic, responsible for all the erroneous beliefs of the Shi'a and a proponent of anthropomorphism (*tajsim*). So far, while acknowledging his importance, most academic literature has uncritically accepted the latter portrayal of Hisham, without attempting to understand the origin of such reports about him. This paper looks at

the sources of information about Hisham's life and, through critical analysis, attempts to reconcile the two vastly different images later ascribed to him.

There has been little academic literature published on Hisham ibn al-Hakam. The main article, to which almost all later scholars have referred to on the subject of Hisham, is that of Madelung in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.¹ His assessment of Hisham's beliefs seems to be based on an uncritical reading of the biographical dictionaries and heresiographies of the classical period. According to Madelung, Hisham believed in a moderate form of anthropomorphism as well as a host of other heterodox beliefs. Ayoub,² Abrahamov,³ Kohlberg,⁴ Bayhom-Daou,⁵ and Modarressi⁶ appear to base their understanding of Hisham on Madelung's article. There are some traditions in the early Shi'a biographical dictionaries that would seem to support the ascription of these views to Hisham, but no serious analysis of their sources appears to have taken place. This paper will consider the theological views and importance of Hisham based on the material he is supposed to have narrated from Ja'far al-Sadiq and Musa al-Kazim in the Shi'a Hadith literature and the portrayal of him in the works of both Shi'a and non-Shi'a scholars of the classical period. Special attention will also be paid to the sources of the information concerning him: we will be looking for 'clusters' of sources that appear to share a common element (and therefore a common agenda) for their portrayal of him.

Hisham's Life

Details about Hisham's life are not entirely clear. It appears he was born either in Kufa (according to al-Najashi) or Wasit (according to al-Kashshi),⁷ although some have claimed was originally from Baghdad.⁸ He was a client (*mawla*) of either the Bani Shayban⁹ or the Kindah¹⁰ tribes. He spent time both in Kufa with the Bani Shayban¹¹ and in Karkh, Baghdad¹² and appears to have had some sort of business dealings in the latter.¹³ We are told that Hisham became a disciple of Ja'far al-Sadiq at a young age and went on to serve his son, Musa al-Kazim.¹⁴ His death is also a matter of dispute: according to al-Najashi, he died in Qasr Waddah in Baghdad 199/815,¹⁵ whereas al-Tusi says he died shortly after the downfall of the Barmakid family of viziers¹⁶ (187/803) having spent a short period in hiding (because of his own associations with them), although al-Tusi acknowledges that others say he died during the reign of Ma'mun (after 197/813).¹⁷ According to al-

Kashshi, he died during the reign of Rashid in 179/795.¹⁸

Hisham lived during an important juncture in the history of Islamic thought. The classical legal and theological schools were in their infancy and Hisham – it would appear – was involved in disputations with their founders. He lived before the Mu'tazilite inquisition of 218/833 and before the rise of the Hanbalites and Ash'arites. During his time, there would have been Kharijites, Kaysanites, Mu'tazilites, Qadarites, Jabarites, and a host of other theologically aligned groups active. There were also the Ghulat¹⁹ and the Waqifites²⁰ who represented heterodox positions within Shi'ism. In this milieu, Hisham – (fortunately, for him) a capable theologian and debater – made his name as one of the founders of Shi'a orthodoxy.

Before becoming a disciple of al-Sadiq, we are told that Hisham already had a rich theological background. He was a student of Abu Shakir ('Abd al-'Ala' ibn Zaid), a companion of Ja'far al-Sadiq²¹ who is described as an atheist (*zindiq*).²² According to his uncle, 'Umar ibn Yazid, Hisham was a Jahmite²³ who originally asked to be introduced to al-Sadiq so that he could engage in disputation (*munazarah*) with him. In the course of these discussions Hisham was apparently confounded by a question posed to him by al-Sadiq and so he asked to defer the discussion and then took many days to come up with an answer. When Hisham returned, the discussion continued until he left again, grieved (*mughtamm*) and bewildered (*mutahayyar*) by another one of al-Sadiq's questions. In a third and final meeting, Hisham found himself awed into silence by al-Sadiq and later became his disciple.²⁴ Given the fact that many of Hisham's famous debates as a proponent of Shi'a doctrine are alleged to have taken place when he was a young man, it would seem that this meeting took place at a very young age.

According to Shi'a sources, al-Sadiq almost instantly recognised the potential of Hisham as an able student and propagator of his doctrines.²⁵ He seems to have treated him preferentially to other disciples, describing him as 'our helper (*nasir*) with his heart, tongue, and hand' and as a fine example of how to engage in *kalam*.²⁶ He also took great pride in Hisham's achievements, and on at least one occasion asked Hisham to recount the details of a particularly momentous debate to the other disciples.²⁷ Hisham was also entrusted by al-Sadiq to teach new converts the doctrines of the Shi'a creed.²⁸ Later, al-Kazim entrusted Hisham with taking care of some of his personal matters for him.²⁹ He also requested that Hisham write – on his behalf – a refutation of the Qadirites.³⁰ These narrations give the

impression that Hisham occupied a trusted and valued position beside the Imam. As we shall see later, this may have contributed to feelings of jealousy amongst other companions of the Imams and motivated them to instigate rumours against him.

Hisham is recorded as having authored several manuscripts. Some of these appear to be on legal issues (such as duties, prohibitions, and semiotics), but the vast majority of them are concerned with theological issues, especially rebuttals (*radd*). Those of a polemical nature include refutations of the atheists (*zanadiqah*), dualists (*ashab al-ithnayn*), and Mu'tazilites (with regard to Talhah and Zubair). He also devotes books to the imamate, *wasiyyah* (of the Prophet), free will (*jabr*) and determinism (*qadr*), ability (*istita'ah*), and God's oneness.³¹

Hisham was very active in his defence of the Shi'a school. In the course of his career he engaged in debates with many well-known scholars such as 'Abdullah ibn Yazid al-'Ibadi,³² Dirar ibn 'Amr al-Dibbi,³³ 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd,³⁴ Abu 'Ubaydah al-Mu'tazili,³⁵ and al-Nazzam.³⁶ He also frequented the gatherings of Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki.³⁷ The majority of his debates which have been documented were with the early Mu'tazilites. But his polemical writings suggest he was also engaged in debates with the Qadarites, Jabarites, atheists, dualists, and Shi'a.³⁸ The main subject of his recorded debates is usually connected to the imamate. Hisham seems to have relied on the approach of reversing the arguments of his opponents so that they seem support his viewpoint on a particular issue.³⁹ However, his debates also landed him in trouble on more than one occasion, and it has even been suggested that they may have contributed to the arrest and imprisonment of al-Kazim.⁴⁰

Hisham's importance was recognised both by his contemporaries and by later Imams and their disciples. Upon learning of his death, 'Ali ibn Isma'il al-Maythami is supposed to have said: 'He was our support (*adud*) and our *shaykh*'.⁴¹ Hisham seems to have been a role model for later Shi'a theologians. Fadl ibn Shadhan⁴² describes himself as someone who 'refutes those who disagree [with us]' in the fashion of Hisham ibn al-Hakam.⁴³ Elsewhere, Nuh ibn Shu'ayb warns people against following a scholar from Khurasan who thinks himself greater (*akbar*) than Hisham ibn al-Hakam.⁴⁴ The implication is, of course, that no one is greater than Hisham! It is not surprising, then, that his followers formed a distinct 'school' within Shi'ism.⁴⁵ Evidence for this can be found when a man asked 'Ali ibn Musa al-Rida about a technical dispute between the followers of Hisham and those of Zurarah ibn

A'yan.⁴⁶ Elsewhere, al-Rida also instructs 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hisham only to pay the *zakat* (alms tax) to those who agree with the views of Hisham ibn al-Hakam.⁴⁷ Indeed, such was the popularity of Hisham that on another occasion al-Rida rebuked someone who claimed to follow the opinion (*qawl*) of Hisham; al-Rida retorted with the words: 'Hisham is not one of us!'⁴⁸ In other words, Hisham is not a source of authoritative knowledge (*'ilm*) like the Imam and the Imam's view must be given precedence over his. All of this would seem to support the traditional assessment of him as a pivotal figure in the genesis of classical Shi'ism.⁴⁹

Classical Views on Hisham

Almost all classical scholars are unanimous on the importance of Hisham in the development of Shi'ism. Ibn al-Nadim describes him in his *Fihrist* as a Shi'a *mutakallim* – the first of them to deal with the subject of the imamate in his *kalam* – who shaped the Shi'a school (*madhhab*) with his insight. He was skilful in his craft of *kalam* and always had an answer. For example, he was asked: 'Was Mu'awiyah at [the Battle of] Badr?', to which he replied: 'Yes, on the other side [i.e. fighting *against* the Prophet]'.⁵⁰ Al-Tusi says Hisham was one of the closest companions (*kharass*) of al-Sadiq and al-Kazim. Hisham also is said to have produced one of the Four Hundred Usul.⁵¹ These views have remain largely unmodified down to the modern era and are reproduced almost verbatim in Amin's *A'yan al-Shi'ah*.⁵²

Non-Shi'a heresiographers also see Hisham as the central figure in Shi'ism's early stage. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani refers to him as the Shaykh of the 'Rafidah' and suggests that he was recognised as superior in rank to Mu'min al-Taq – who was actually his senior – as it was Hisham who gave him this title.⁵³ Claiming that it was done in his capacity as the Shaykh of the Shi'a might suggest that al-'Asqalani considers Hisham more influential in shaping the sect than al-Sadiq himself. Of course, this may simply be a result of Hisham's infamy in Sunni circles and a desire to disassociate Shi'ism from the Imams themselves (thereby robbing it of its legitimacy). However, the fact that al-'Asqalani is able to suggest this shows how important Hisham is viewed in retrospect both by Shi'a and Sunni scholars.

Both Sunni and Mu'tazilite authors ascribe a number of unorthodox views to Hisham, and this appears to form the basis of the modern understanding of him. Ibn Hajar accuses him of

anthropomorphism (specifically that God is the height of seven men), that God's knowledge of a thing does not exist before the thing exists (i.e. it is *mubdath*),⁵⁴ extreme predestination (*jabr shadi*), and accepting the impossible (*mahal*) that any intelligent person (*dhū 'aql*) would reject without hesitation.⁵⁵ These latter impossibilities may extend to certain unusual miracles attributed to the Imams (which is what Ibn Hazm would seem to suggest) or simply very poor *kalam* reasoning.⁵⁶ In addition to the above, the Mu'tazilites also accuse him of holding that unbearable things (*ma la yutaq*) are not incumbent (*ma yattasil bil-taklif*) and denying God's justice.⁵⁷ Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar ascribed the heretical views of the Shi'a to Hisham, who he alleges took them from the aforementioned Abu Shakir.⁵⁸ It seems clear that the popular estimation of Hisham in non-Shi'a circles was that he was an arch-heretic. This is, of course, to be expected. And many of the views being condemned are contained in the traditions narrated by Hisham (and perhaps misunderstood or misconstrued) but are not considered problematic by mainstream Twelver Shi'ism.⁵⁹ What is unusual, though, is the accusation of anthropomorphism, a belief neither sanctioned by the Imams or the classical Shi'a theologians. What is even more unusual is that this view of Hisham may have its roots in the circle of companions that surrounded al-Sadiq and al-Kazim.

Criticism of Hisham within the Shi'a literature

Criticism of Hisham and the attribution of unorthodox beliefs to him are not confined to later non-Shi'a sources. There are a number of reports in the biographical literature, attributed to Shi'a sources contemporary with Hisham, that portray him in a very negative light. This is rather more surprising, as the later image of Hisham is that of a devout student and defender of the Imams. Critically examining these accounts may not establish which is historically accurate, but it will shed light on divisions in the early Shi'a community as such material would have probably been preserved by individuals hostile towards Hisham and/or his students.

It is possible to place the sources critical of Hisham into two major categories: firstly, those accounts that attribute anthropomorphism to Hisham, and secondly, those that criticise him for his engagement in excessive involvement in theological disputations (intimated as a cause for the assassination of al-Kazim). Our examination of these reports will look at both their content and their supposed sources (using the

chain of narrators, where provided).

The reports which accuse Hisham of anthropomorphism vary in their level of detail. Some of these, such as that of Muhammad ibn al-Hakim⁶⁰ and Muhammad ibn al-Faraj al-Rakhji,⁶¹ simply state that Hisham believed that God had a body (*jism*) and ask the Imam for clarification (these are usually after Hisham's death, i.e. asking an Imam from al-Rida onwards).⁶² Others include extra detail about his supposed beliefs. 'Ali ibn Abu Hamzah⁶³ tells al-Sadiq that he had heard Hisham narrate that God is an 'eternal, luminous body' (*jism samadi nuri*).⁶⁴ Yunus ibn Zibyan⁶⁵ tells al-Sadiq that Hisham claims that God has a body because only a body can be an agent (*fa'il*) and God must be an agent in order to be a Creator (*sani*).⁶⁶ Hasan ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hamani⁶⁷ told al-Rida that Hisham claimed God has a body which nothing is like (*laysa kamithlihi shay*).⁶⁸ What these reports share in common is the use of the attribution of a '*jism*' (body) to God. It seems unlikely, however, that this is an accurate reflection of Hisham's beliefs. Firstly because he fails to narrate anything close to this from the Imams themselves and – had he wanted to support such a doctrine as a Shi'a⁶⁹ – he would have needed to show it was somehow derived from them.⁷⁰ Another element these reports have in common is that a third-party is attributing these beliefs to Hisham and seeking clarification from the Imam (who sometimes rebukes Hisham very harshly). Hisham is never seen to express them himself. This leaves open the possibility that they have either misunderstood Hisham's argument or they are consciously misconstruing it to instigate the Imam against him or both.

Al-Sharif al-Murtada in his *al-Shafi fi al-Imamah* proposes exactly such an origin for these accusations. Firstly, he highlights that a phrase such as 'a body unlike other bodies' (*jismun la kal-ajsam*), which Hisham is supposed to have used,⁷¹ is merely a poor expression (*ghalat fi 'ibarah*) of an otherwise valid concept. Alternatively, Hisham may have said this in opposition (*mu'aridah*) to those Mu'tazilites who said: 'God is a thing (*shay*)' unlike other things.' So Hisham argued that if it were possible to say this, then they could not oppose anthropomorphism in the sense of God being 'a body unlike other bodies'. This goes back to the classical theological manoeuvre whereby a scholar refutes the view of another by showing that it leads to an unacceptable conclusion. Of course, al-Murtada makes clear that this does not mean that Hisham has to believe in this unacceptable conclusion, as 'one does not have to believe in everything he asks – it may be that [Hisham] wanted to obtain their answer on this issue...or to show them the deficiency'. It is

then a fault on the part of a listener who failed to comprehend Hisham's objective properly or who was attempting to misconstrue what he actually said.⁷²

Had Hisham actually believed in anthropomorphism, says al-Murtada, then we 'find no excuse for him' just as there is no excuse for anyone else to believe such a thing. However, he maintains that no Shi'a theologian has ever maintained Hisham has said such a thing – he ridicules any 'reasonable' person who believes that God is the height of 'seven men' – and that an accurate account of a sect's beliefs must be taken 'from the mouths of its advocates'.⁷³ In making such a caveat, al-Murtada is well aware that the intention of his opponent is to discredit the Shi'a by tarring one of their founders with heresy. Thus he deftly makes the accusation a non-issue by maintaining the belief itself is incorrect and reaffirming the authority of the 'living' theologians as exponents of the religion.

In substantiating al-Murtada's contention that this accusation has only come from outsiders and not from the Shi'a themselves, it is significant that many of the chains of these traditions contain narrators who are either Waqifites or Ghulat. One chain contains both al-Hamani, who was a student of 'Ali ibn al-Hamzah the Waqifite, and 'Ali ibn al-'Abbas the extremist. 'Ali ibn al-Hamzah was a contemporary of Hisham, so he may have informed his student, al-Hamani, of Hisham's heterodoxy, who then passed this along to 'Ali ibn al-'Abbas. This does not mean that these three narrators colluded across generations against Hisham; rather, it suggests that they all found it convenient to accept and propagate a view of Hisham as unorthodox and an unreliable source of doctrine. We can be certain that Hisham – true to his character – would have been actively debating with Waqifites (if he outlived al-Kazim), Ghulat, and even other mainstream Shi'a. His students would have carried on this work after his death, and there were many heated debates with the Waqifites after the death of al-Kazim regarding the succession of al-Rida.⁷⁴ This would constitute an excellent motive for Waqifites like 'Ali ibn al-Hamzah to undermine Hisham's credibility and thereby weaken his arguments and the arguments of his students against them. On this basis, al-Khu'i is quick to dismiss these reports as weak,⁷⁵ but the weakness of the chains does not guarantee the falsity of the transmission. In fact, while we might doubt the content as being authentically from the Imams – just as we might equally doubt any positive reports about Hisham as coming from them – what it does show is that such reports were widespread, which means that the

narrators found them useful. Judging from the sources of the reports of his belief in anthropomorphism, the Ghulat and Waqifites seem likely candidates for the dissemination of these reports. It is possible that these accusations originated from non-Shi'a sources (such as the Mu'tazilites) and were adopted by his opponents within the sect, but there was clearly a sufficient degree of enmity felt towards Hisham in some Shi'a circles to suggest that these came from within. This is evinced by reports suggesting that Hisham's theological disputations were causing problems for al-Kazim and that these were at least partly responsible for the latter's imprisonment and murder. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Hajjaj⁷⁶ says that the Imam, Musa al-Kazim, sent him to order Hisham to refrain from *kalam*. Hisham stopped for a month before returning to his debates. 'Abd al-Rahman heard of this and went back to Hisham to remind him of al-Kazim's directive. Hisham apparently said 'someone like me does not desist from *kalam*.' So al-Kazim then sent him the message: 'Does it satisfy you to share in the shedding of a Muslim's blood? For you have shared in the shedding of mine!' and added: 'If he does not be silent, then he is [to me] like the one who slaughters an animal.' Yunus ibn 'Abd al-Rahman (a student of Hisham), as if to counter the accusation, narrates the same story from Hisham's perspective, adding that the command to desist from *kalam* was because of the political circumstances under the Caliph al-Mahdi and not, as 'Abd al-Rahman has tried to portray, a general order to desist from debating.⁷⁷ There are actually a number of reports in which Hisham is explicitly implicated in al-Kazim's death and other reports whose sole purpose is to absolve Hisham of any blame. Indeed, there can be no doubt that the latter set of reports are a response to the former, as they use almost exactly the same wording to defend Hisham as the other reports used to censure him.⁷⁸ Also in al-Kashshi, there is a report that appears to be in praise of Hisham, but mentions his debates as one of the causes (*sabab min al-asbab*) leading to the arrest of al-Kazim.⁷⁹ This is not to say that these reports about Hisham are historically accurate, however, merely that the accusation that he was somehow responsible for al-Kazim's end would have come first and the reports absolving him of blame were a reaction to this. This shows that there was significant polarisation around Hisham's personality amongst the Shi'a themselves.

There appears to have been a specific group of companions arrayed against Hisham both during and after his life. 'Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Hajjaj appears in another narration that appears to be critical of him.

This time Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Hakim al-Jath'ami⁸⁰ says that a group of prominent Shi'a *mutakallimun* – which included Hisham and 'Abd al-Rahman – gathered together. Hisham and another *mutakallim* seem to have started a theological debate, during the course of which 'Abd al-Rahman interrupts and accuses Hisham of disbelief (*kufr*) and deviation (*ilhad*). Apparently, so great was his distress that he felt it necessary to write to al-Kazim for clarification on the views expressed by Hisham.⁸¹ In light of this, and the aforementioned tradition concerning al-Kazim's order to desist from *kalam*, it appears that 'Abd al-Rahman was often involved in confrontations with Hisham. This could suggest that the two of them – however impeccable their credentials are in the later biographical works – were rivals who held divergent views. In turn, it seems likely that 'Abd al-Rahman may have been motivated by this to discredit Hisham by implicating him in the death of al-Kazim – or perhaps he genuinely believed him to be responsible for it. This is supported by another report narrated by his student, Yunus, that al-Rida called Hisham an 'upright servant' (*'abd nasih*) but remarks that he was subject to jealousy (*hasad*) from other companions.⁸²

The fierce disagreement surrounding the character of Hisham indicates real divisions within the mainstream of the sect, and not simply on the fringes (typified by the Ghulat and Waqifites). Clearly there were mainstream Shi'a scholars, both of Hisham's generation and of later generations, that opposed him and were keen to censure and discredit him. As we have seen, this was probably motivated partly by some disagreements between them and Hisham on theological grounds and partly by jealousy. The emergence of other reports with the clear aim of rebutting the former indicates that Hisham's students – in particular Yunus ibn 'Abd al-Rahman – were keen to defend their teacher and his doctrines. This is supported by a tradition in which Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Jawad was asked by Abu 'Ali al-Rashid⁸³ if he should pray behind Hisham's followers (*ashab*). The Imam instructed him to follow 'Ali ibn Hadid,⁸⁴ who refused to pray behind them. Reliable or not, this tradition shows that the polarisation around Hisham continued after his death and was serious enough to warrant a faction within the Shi'a who would not pray behind his followers. If there really were an identifiable 'school' of Hisham then this too would have encouraged the spreading of negative reports to discredit not only the individual but also his later followers.

It is helpful if we view the reports about Hisham's unorthodox

beliefs (like anthropomorphism) against this wider backdrop. Hisham's skill as a debater, his favoured position with the Imams, and his great skill in crafting arguments (arguments which may not have always been understood properly) seem to have generated sufficient enmity that his opponents were ready to use any means necessary to undermine him. But, as many opponents as he had, there were clearly those companions who admired Hisham and were keen to rebut criticisms of him. This is borne out by the volume of reports both praising and condemning Hisham (often on the same issue) and shows that there were both those who supported his views and others eager to discredit him, pointing to a division within the early Shi'a.

With criticism of Hisham coming from within Shi'ism (that is, from Hisham's Shi'a opponents), it is easy to see how non-Shi'a heresiographers were able to construe both him and his followers as a distinct grouping. Constant references to the opinions and followers of Hisham, coupled with his somewhat controversial status, made it easy for them to be characterised as heretics. This seemed to have happened quite early, as questions about Hisham are addressed to Imams al-Rida and al-Jawad. This suggests two things: firstly that the students of Hisham were still active and engaging in debates with other 'schools' within mainstream Shi'ism at the time and that these schools were instigating rumours against them with these reports. Secondly, and more likely given their widespread adoption in the non-Shi'a heresiographies, other sects (such as the Mu'tazilites) probably viewed Hisham as the founder of Shi'ism and therefore sought to attack his credentials directly as a means of weakening the Shi'a position. Therefore, the followers of the Imams came to them for clarification on the views of Hisham in order to respond to their polemics.

Conclusion

Classical Twelver scholars use Hisham almost as a forerunner of their own school of mainstream Shi'ism. Many reports portray him as being a close and trusted companion of the Imams and an outstanding student of their teachings (a perception he seems to have cultivated by narrating some of their praise of him). It is clear that he played an important role in the debates that were defining Shi'ism during the formative period (second century AH) and formed a loyal following of students who continued his 'school' for several generations.

On the other hand, it seems that Hisham's propensity for debating,

his precocious character, and the favours bestowed upon him by the Imams from a young age, attracted jealousy from many of his co-religionists, with whom he seemed to have a relationship of rivalry. Indeed there are cases of open confrontation between him and another companion (considered impeccable by later scholars). His skill in debating also made him well known beyond the sect. These two factors combined to provide an excellent motivation for his opponents to find reports that ascribe heterodox views to Hisham as a means of discrediting him.

It is plausible that his prominent role in debates (combined with the obvious political danger of his ideas) drew attention to al-Kazim, but it seems unlikely that he was the primary cause of his imprisonment, especially since those reports that suggest this also say that he died shortly after al-Kazim was imprisoned, which was a full four years before al-Rashid had al-Kazim assassinated. However, what is most plausible is that the accusation of anthropomorphism seems like an intentional misrepresentation of Hisham's ideas intended to either instigate the Imam against him or his followers or to discredit him as a theologian, depending on who was making use of these allegations.

What is clear is that Hisham was important enough to warrant so much ink being spilt over his character, both in terms of both defamation and protection. Hisham's significance extended well beyond his lifetime. The fact that al-Murtada is compelled to respond to accusations against Hisham shows the perception of the non-Shi'a *mutakallimun* of al-Murtada's time. These non-Shi'a *mutakallimun* must have held that Hisham was the founder of Shi'a *kalam* and they must have believed, therefore, that Hisham was a primary target for their polemics.

Table of Key Transliterated Terms

Term Appearing in Text	Arabic	Term With Diacritics
'Abd nasih	عبد ناصح	'Abd nāsih
'Adud	عضد	'Aḍud
Ashab al-ithnayn	أصحاب الإثنين	Aṣḥāb al-ithnayn
Hisham ibn al-Hakam	هشام بن حكم	Ḥishām ibn al-Ḥakam
Ghulat	غلات	Ghulāt
Istita'ah	إستطاعة	Istiṭā'ah
Ja'far al-Sadiq	جعفر الصادق	Ja'far al-Ṣādiq

Jism	جسم	Jism
Jismun la kal-ajsam	جسم لا كالأجسام	Jismun lā kal-ajsām
Kalam	كلام	Kalām
Khawass	خواصّ	Khawāṣṣ
Madhhab	مذهب	Madhhab
Mahal	محال	Mahāl
Mu'aridah	معارضة	Mu'arīḍah
Muhdath	محدث	Muhdath
Ma la yutaq	ما لا يطاق	Mā lā yuṭāq
Ma yattasil bil-taklif	ما يتّصل بالتكليف	Mā yattaṣil bil-taklif
Mawla	مولى	Mawlā
Musa al-Kazim	موسى الكاظم	Mūsā al-Kāẓim
Mutahayyar	متحير	Mutahayyar
Mutakallim	متكلّم	Mutakallim
Nasir	نصير	Nasīr
Qawl	قول	Qawl
Rafidah	رافضة	Rāfidah
Sabab min al-asbab	سبب من الاسباب	Sabab min al-asbāb
Sani'	صانع	Ṣāni'
Zanadiqah	زنادقة	Zanādiqah

Notes

¹ W. Madelung, 'Hisham b. Hakam' in *Encyclopedia of Islam* III (Leiden: Brill, 2nd ed., 1979), 496-498.

² See: M. Ayoub, 'Divine Preordination and Human Hope: A Study of the Concept of Bada' in Imami Shi'i Tradition' in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* CVI, no. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1986).

³ See: B. Abrahamov, 'Al-Kasim Ibn Ibrahim's Theory of the Imamate', in *Arabica* XXXIV, no. 1 (Mar., 1987).

⁴ See: E. Kohlberg, 'From Imamiyya to Ithna-'Ashariyya', in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* XXXIX, no. 3 (1976).

⁵ See: T. Bayhom-Daou, 'The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran according to al-Fadl ibn Shadhan al-Nisaburi (d. 260 A.H./874 A.D.)' in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* LXIV, no. 2 (2001).

⁶ See: H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1993).

⁷ Ahmad ibn 'Abbas al-Najashi, *Rijal al-Najashi* (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1407 AH), 433; Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith* (Najaf: Markaz Nashr al-Thiqafah al-Islamiyyah, 1992), no. 13358.

⁸ Al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13358.

⁹ Abu Ja'far al-Tusi, *Fihrist* (Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Fiqahah, 1417 AH), 259.

- ¹⁰ Al-Najashi, *Rijal al-Najashi*, 433.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Al-Tusi, *Fihrist*, 259.
- ¹³ Abu 'Amr al-Kashshi, *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifat al-Rijal* (Mashhad: University of Mashhad, 1404 AH), 255; al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13,358.
- ¹⁴ Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Baghdadi (al-Shaykh al-Mufid), *Kitab al-Irshad* II (Beirut: Mu'assasat Al al-Bayt li-Tahqiq al-Turath, 1993), 194: Hisham is described as a young man (*ghulam*) with the first lines of a beard on his cheeks (*awwal ma ikhtatta 'aridabu*).
- ¹⁵ Al-Najashi, *Rijal al-Najashi*, 433.
- ¹⁶ See Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Tabari* VI (Leiden: Brill, n.d.), 484 for his account of al-Rashid's execution of Ja'far ibn Yahya al-Barmaki.
- ¹⁷ Al-Tusi, *Fihrist*, 259.
- ¹⁸ Cited in al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13358.
- ¹⁹ Extremists who attributed divinity to the Imams; see: Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 21.
- ²⁰ Those who 'stopped' at a particular Imam and did not recognise his successor, see: *ibid.*, 60.
- ²¹ Abu Ja'far al-Tusi, *Rijal al-Shaykh al-Tusi* (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1415 AH), 241.
- ²² See al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 7898.
- ²³ See *Ibid.*, no. 13358. For more on the Jahmites, see Shahrastani, *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, I (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.), 86.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi* I (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islami, 1388 AH), 87: Nadr ibn Suwayd from Hisham himself: Hisham studied the derivation of the names of God with al-Sadiq, who asked 'have you understood, Hisham, in such a way that you can defeat our opponents who take with Allah other than Him?' to which Hisham replied in the affirmative. Al-Sadiq then said: 'May God avail you and establish you Hisham!' See also al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13,358, where he is recorded as having asked five hundred issues [*harf*] of *kalam* from al-Sadiq in Mina.
- ²⁶ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi* I, 171.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 72: 'Ali ibn Mansur narrates from Hisham himself.
- ²⁹ Cited in al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13358.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ See Muhammad ibn Ishaq al-Nadim, *Fihrist Ibn al-Nadim*, ed. Rida Tajjadud (n.p., n.d.) 223; for a complete list of his writings
- ³² 'Abdullah ibn Yazid al-Ibadi: possibly the founder of the Ibadi school of the Kharijites. See: Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Lisan al-Mizan* III (Beirut: al-Mu'assasat al-'Alami lil-Matbu'at, 1971), 248.
- ³³ Darar ibn 'Amr al-Dibbi: the eponymous founder of the Darariyyah; a sub-sect of Mu'tazilites that amongst other things claimed that God was knowing and powerful insofar as he was not ignorant or impotent and denied the punishment of the grave (see Shahrastani, *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal* I, 90). Al-Dibbi's birth and death are unknown, but he was alive in the time of al-Rashid and was a judge. He was accused of heresy (*zindiqah*) and forced to go into hiding. See Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Amr ibn Musa ibn

Hammad al-'Aqili, *Du'afa al-Kabir* II (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), 222; al-'Asqalani, *Lisan al-Mizan* III, 203; Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, 214.

³⁴ 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd ibn Bab (d. 144): a shaykh of the Qadarites and Mu'tazilites. See Jamal al-Din Abu al-Hajjaj al-Mazzi, *Tabdhib al-Kamal* XXII (Baghdad: University of Baghdad, 1985), 123; al-Dhahabi, *Sayyar 'Alam al-Nubala'* VI (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 1993), 104; Abu Yahya al-Murtada, *Tabaqat al-Mu'tazilah* (Beirut: n.p., 1987), 35.

³⁵ Abu 'Ubaydah Mu'ammār ibn al-Muthanna al-Tamimi (b. 120): a Mu'tazilite from Basrah, several books are attributed to him on *majaz al-Qur'an* (the inimitability of the Qur'an), *gharib al-hadith* (unusual *hadith*), the killing of 'Uthman, and the history of al-Hajjaj. See: al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad* XIII (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 252.

³⁶ Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Sayyar al-Nazzam: a student of Wasil ibn 'Ata and prominent Mu'tazilite. See: Abu Yahya, *Tabaqat al-Mu'tazilah*, 49.

³⁷ Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki (b. 120): vizier to the 'Abbasid Caliph Mansur. See Tabari, *Tarikh* VIII 287.

³⁸ One of these works was authored in response to Hisham ibn Salim al-Jawaliqi, another disciple of al-Sadiq. See Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, 223.

³⁹ For examples of these debates see: Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Baghdadi (al-Shaykh al-Mufid), *Al-Ikhtisas* (Qum: Jami'at al-Mudarrisin, n.d.), 96; al-Sharif al-Murtada, *Al-Fusul al-Mukhtarah* (Beirut: Dar al-Mufid, 1993), 9, 268; Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (al-Shaykh al-Saduq), *Kamal al-Din* II (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1405 AH), 362; al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi* I, 169, 172; al-Khawarizmi, *Al-Manaqib* (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1411 AH), 236, 270, 276.

⁴⁰ Al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13358.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² He was a prominent companion of Imams 'Ali ibn Musa al-Rida and Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Jawad and deputy of Imams 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hadi and Hassan ibn Muhammad al-'Askari, a theologian and a jurist. See: al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 4301.

⁴³ Cited in al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13358.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ It could be this school that Shahrastani was referring to when he dubbed the followers of Hisham the 'Hishamiyyah'. See *al-Milal wa al-Nihal* I, 148.

⁴⁶ Cited in al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13,358.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (al-Shaykh al-Saduq), *al-Tawhid* (Qum: Jami'at al-Mudarrisin, n.d.), 104

⁴⁹ See al-Najashi, *Rijal*, 433 and Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, 224 for a full list of his written works.

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, 223.

⁵¹ Al-Tusi, *Fihrist*, 258: The Four Hundred Usul are notebooks of *hadiths* recorded by the companions of different Imams from the Imams themselves.

⁵² M. Amin, *A'yan al-Shi'ah* X (Beirut: Dar al-Ta'aruf lil-Matbu'at, n.d.), 264.

⁵³ Al-'Asqalani, *Lisan al-Mizan* V, 301.

⁵⁴ Perhaps this notion is connected to *bada'* or a change in God's knowledge, an idea whose origin in mainstream Shi'ism is attributed to this period. See: Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 58.

⁵⁵ Al-'Asqalani, *Lisan al-Mizan* VI 194. These are largely identical to the accusations made by Ibn Hazm, see: I. Friedlaender, 'The Heterodoxies of the Shiites in the Presentation of Ibn Hazm', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* XXVIII (1907).

⁵⁶ For example, a narration from Hisham in which al-Sadiq states (at great length) that God would be able to place the whole universe in an egg shell without breaking the shell or shrinking the universe. See: Kulayni, *Al-Kafi* I, 79. The kind of analogy contained in this tradition may have offended the sensibilities of some theologians.

⁵⁷ Al-Sharif al-Murtada, *Al-Shafi fi al-Imamah* I (Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Sadiq, 1410 AH), 82.

⁵⁸ See R. C. Martin, 'The Role of the Basrah Mu'tazilah in Formulating the Doctrine of the Apologetic Miracle', in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* XXXIX, no. 3 (1980).

⁵⁹ *Bada'* for example, was a feature of classical Shi'a theology. See Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (al-Shaykh al-Saduq), *I'tiqad fi Din al-Imamiyyah* (Qum: Dar ul-Mufid, 1414 AH).

⁶⁰ His name also appears 'Muhammad ibn al-Hakam'. He was a companion of al-Sadiq and al-Kazim from whom are narrated reports in the works of al-Kulayni, al-Saduq, and al-Tusi. Not much else is known about him. See al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 11,608 where one of the narrators in the chain leading to Muhammad ibn al-Hakim is 'Ali ibn al-'Abbas, an extremist.

⁶¹ A companion of al-Rida, al-Jawad, and al-Hadi, considered trustworthy by al-Kashshi, al-Najashi, and al-Tusi. See al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 11,650.

⁶² Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi* I, 104, for both narrations.

⁶³ He is 'Ali ibn Abu Hamzah al-Bata'ini, a follower of al-Sadiq and al-Kazim, who became a Waqifite (i.e. someone who 'stopped' at Kazim and did not acknowledge al-Rida after him) after the latter's death. He is credited with being one of the first to espouse the doctrines of the Waqifites. Ibn al-Ghada'iri curses him and says he was the 'most extreme in enmity' towards al-Rida. However, material is still narrated from him in the four books of Hadith central to Twelver Shi'ism. See al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 7,846.

⁶⁴ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi* I, 104.

⁶⁵ A companion of al-Sadiq, accused of extremism in his beliefs (*ghuluw*) and of narrating – amongst other things – strange stories about the supernatural powers of the Imams. See al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 14,640.

⁶⁶ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi* I, 105.

⁶⁷ A companion of al-Rida, who narrated from 'Ali ibn Abu Hamzah al-Bata'ini (see above). Not much is known about him. See al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 3,225.

⁶⁸ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi* I, 105 – in this *hadith* the narrator identifies Abu al-Hasan (the *kunyah* of al-Rida) as Musa ibn Ja'far. Perhaps there has been a mistake either on the part of a narrator or a copier of the text. It seems likely that al-Rida is meant here as the narrator is known to be his companion and not that of al-Kazim. See al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 3,225.

⁶⁹ It does not seem likely that these accusations are dated back to Hisham's time as a *jahmi*, or student, of Abu Shakir because – if the accounts are to be believed – Hisham was very young when he came to al-Sadiq.

⁷⁰ See: al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi* I, 171, where Hisham attributes his *kalam* to the teachings of the Imams.

⁷¹ Al-Kulayni, *Al-Kafi* I, 105.

⁷² Al-Murtada, *Al-Shafi fi al-Imamah* I, 83-85.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ For a summary of this period see Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 60-62.

⁷⁵ Al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13,358.

⁷⁶ A companion of al-Sadiq, al-Kazim and (after some hesitation, it seems) al-Rida, considered very reliable by the classical experts of Hadith. See al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 8013.

⁷⁷ Cited in al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13358.

⁷⁸ These narrations are all provided by al-Kashshi, *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifat al-Rijal*, 255-280. See for instance one claiming that he shared in the blood (*sharakah fi damm*) of al-Kazim and one – using the exact phrase – saying that he didn't. The narration from 'Abd al-Rahman says that Hisham was like a slaughterer (*dhubbh*), another – again with the same word – says that he wasn't.

⁷⁹ Cited in al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13358.

⁸⁰ He is a companion of al-Kazim; see al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 5,453.

⁸¹ One of the narrators of this *hadith*, Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Hamdani, is considered a fabricator and one of the Ghulat. See al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 12970.

⁸² Cited in al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 13358.

⁸³ A companion of al-Jawad, considered trustworthy by al-Tusi (see al-Tusi, *Rijal*, 375, no. 5535).

⁸⁴ A Fathite (i.e. those who acknowledged 'Abdullah al-Aftah as an Imam between al-Sadiq and al-Kazim) and companion of al-Kazim, al-Rida, and al-Jawad. See al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, no. 9590.