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FROM IMĀMIYYA TO ITHNĀ-'ASHARIYYA

By ETAN KOHLBERG

In memoriam Richard Walzer

The Imāmī Shī'ī theory of the imāmate evolved gradually during the first Islamic century and was given a definitive shape in the middle of the second/eighth century by Hishām b. al-Ḥakam.¹ For the next 100 years or so, until the death in 260/874 of the eleventh Imām, al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, no significant changes seem to have been introduced. Only in the mid-fourth/tenth century does a major addition appear in the form of a doctrine: it is the belief that there are 12 Imāms, the last of whom remains in a state of concealment (*ghayba*) until his ultimate return as Mahdī, or Qā'im. This *ghayba* is divided into two periods: a shorter, 'lesser' *ghayba* (*al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*), lasting from 260/874 to 329/941, during which the Imām was represented on earth by four successive *safirs*; and a longer, 'greater' *ghayba* (*al-ghayba al-kubrā*), whose duration is known only to God. It is this doctrine which distinguishes Twelver Shī'ism from the earlier Imāmiyya,² and it is worth examining in some detail its origins and the main stages of its development.

The earliest evidence for the belief in a line of 12 Imāms is to be found in heresiographical literature. The *Kitāb firaq al-shī'a* of al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī and the *Kitāb al-maḡālāt wa'l-firaq* of Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh al-Qummī (both completed around 900) end with a description of the subdivisions, or sects, into which the Shī'ī community split after the death of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī. The accounts in the two sources sometimes differ;³ yet with regard to the

¹ See the article 'Hishām b. al-Ḥakam', by W. Madelung, in *EI*, second ed.

² W. Montgomery Watt ('The Rāfidites: a preliminary study', *Oriens*, xvi, 1963, 119 f.) has pointed out that the term 'Imāmiyya' occurs in a Zaydī source used by Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935-6) (*Maḡālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul 1929-33, 64), and has suggested that it was first employed before 850. This suggestion appears to be corroborated by an additional source, the *Kitāb naqḍ al-'uthmāniyya* by the Baghdādī Mu'tazilī Abū Ja'far al-Iskāfī (d. 240/854). At one point al-Iskāfī dissociates himself from the Imāmiyya whose obduracy, he says, leads them to 'deny well-known things' (The text is reprinted from Ibn Abī 'l-Ḥadīd's *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha* at the end of al-Jāhīz's *Kitāb al-'uthmāniyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Ḥārūn, Cairo, 1374/1955, 318). The terms *qaḍ'iyya* and *ahl al-nasaq* (the latter used almost exclusively by al-Nāshī 'al-Akbar (d. 293/906); see J. van Ess, *Frühe mu'tazilītische Häresiographie*, Beirut, 1971, 28 f.) are older and broader than 'Imāmiyya'. The term 'Ithnā-'ashariyya' was probably first used around 1000. It does not appear in the *Fihrist* of the Imāmī Ibn al-Nadīm (d' 380/990) (cf. R. Sellheim, *Israel Oriental Studies*, II, 1972, 428-32), but is employed by the rabidly anti-Shī'ī 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) to refer to a sub-section of the Imāmiyya (*al-Farq bayna 'l-firaq*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyi 'l-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, 1384/1964, 23, 64). With the increasing predominance of the Twelvers, the terms 'Imāmiyya' and 'Ithnā-'ashariyya' gradually became synonymous (see I. Friedlaender, 'The heterodoxies of the Shiites in the presentation of Ibn Ḥazm', *JAOS*, xxix, 1908, 151).

³ For a detailed analysis of the relationship of the two sources, see W. Madelung, 'Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Firaq-Literatur', *Der Islam* XLIII, 1-2, 1967, 37 ff.

most important of these sects, the Imāmiyya, al-Nawbakhtī and Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh are in essential agreement: they portray its members as believing that al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī had died (and had neither disappeared nor been resurrected), leaving behind an heir who was in hiding at the time of writing, but who would reappear at some future point in time.⁴ The concern of the Imāmīs at this stage is to prove, partly by reliance on the precedent of the Prophet,⁵ that an Imām may go into hiding in times of danger; but there is no clear statement to the effect that this period of concealment might be prolonged beyond the life-span of an ordinary person, and hence no attempt to explain such a phenomenon by reference to the *mu'ammari'n* (i.e. 'those whose life has been prolonged by God'), as was to be done later by Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Bābawayhi (d. 381/991) and others.⁶ Other salient features of Twelver Shī'ī doctrine are also absent from these two texts: for example, the possibility of two *ghaybas* is not mentioned; no explicit reference is made to the fact that with al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī's son the number of Imāms has reached 12, nor is there any indication as to the particular significance which that number might have. Finally, it is by no means clear from this description of Imāmī beliefs that the name of the twelfth Imām had yet been agreed upon; it is simply stated that this name is a secret not to be divulged. Only the members of another sect⁷ identified him as Muḥammad.⁸ The Imāmiyya must at any rate have accepted this identification quite early, since they are described by al-Ash'arī in his *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn* as believing that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan is the hidden Imām.⁹ Except for this detail there are no substantial differences between al-Ash'arī's description of their teachings and that of al-Nawbakhtī and Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh.

Indirect confirmation for the absence of a specifically Twelver Shī'ī doctrine at the time of al-'Askarī's death is provided by the contemporary Imāmī sources themselves. The Imāmī scholar Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār

⁴ Al-Nawbakhtī, *Kitāb firaq al-shī'a*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul, 1931, 90-3; Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh, *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa 'l-firaq*, ed. M. J. Mashkūr, Tehran, 1383/1963, 102-6.

⁵ See Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh, *op. cit.*, 103.

⁶ cf. I. Goldziher, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*, II. *Das Kitāb al-Mu'ammari'n des Abū Ḥatīm al-Sijistānī*, Leiden, 1899, pp. lxii-lxix.

⁷ The sixth in al-Nawbakhtī's list (*op. cit.*, 84 f.), the eleventh in the *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa 'l-firaq* (114).

⁸ According to the *Kitāb firaq al-shī'a*, Muḥammad was two years old when his father died; the information in the *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa 'l-firaq* is that he was grown up (*bāligh*) at the time (*loc. cit.*).

⁹ Al-Ash'arī, *op. cit.*, 17 f., 30. Al-Ash'arī (*ibid.*, 14) also mentions a sect of *ghulāt* who believe in the same 12 persons but who claim that God resides in each of them. It should be noted that while all Twelver Shī'ī doctors agree that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan is the hidden Imām, there are traditions according to which it is forbidden to mention his name (see e.g. al-Kulīnī, *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī, Tehran, 1375/1955-6-1377/1957-8, I, 332 f.). This principle, however, was not universally observed (cf. e.g. Ibn Bābawayhi, *A Shī'ite creed*, trans. Asaf A. A. Fyzee, London, 1942, 98). An attempt at harmonization is made by explaining that the Qā'im has two names: one, Aḥmad, is made known, and the other, Muḥammad, remains a secret. See Muḥsin al-Kāshānī, *al-Nawādir fī jam' al-aḥādīth*, Tehran, 1380/1960, 148.

al-Qummī (d. 290/903), for example, compiled in his *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* traditions on the virtues of the Imāms; yet he fails to quote any traditions on the *ghayba* or the 12 Imāms. One of al-Ṣaffār's teachers, Abū Ja'far Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893), known particularly for his *Kitāb al-maḥāsīn*, provides us with similar negative information. In the first section of that book, entitled *Kitāb al-ashkāl wa 'l-qarā'in*, he quotes traditions dealing with the significance of various numbers;¹⁰ yet he is content with citing traditions on the numbers 3 to 10, and does not deem it necessary to proceed up to the number 12. By contrast, the *Kitāb al-khiṣāl* of Ibn Bābawayhi, which is devoted entirely to traditions of this kind, and which reaches up to *mā ba'd al-alf* 'over a thousand', has a lengthy chapter on the number 12, comprising mainly traditions on the 12 Imāms.¹¹ Moreover, al-Barqī quotes a well-known Imāmī tradition, in which al-Khiḍr meets 'Alī and his son al-Ḥasan and reveals to them the names of the Imāms;¹² but in the version cited by al-Barqī, unlike other (and probably later) versions of this tradition, al-Khiḍr mentions by name only 'Alī, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn; the traditionist adds, 'and he counted every last one of them (*ḥattā atā 'alā ākhirihim*)', but the names or the number of Imāms who are to follow al-Ḥusayn are not specified. The *Kitāb al-maḥāsīn* and the *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* were compiled either before or shortly after the beginning of *al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*. The absence of specifically Twelver Shī'ī beliefs from these works probably means that belief in 12 Imāms had not yet been formulated as an Imāmī tenet.

The situation, however, must have changed quite rapidly; for in the *Tafsīr* by 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 307/919), the Khīḍr-tradition appears already with the names of all 12 Imāms.¹³ The culmination of this process is reached with the *Uṣūl al-kāfī* of Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulīnī (d. 329/941), where all the basic ingredients of Twelver Shī'ī theory may be found.¹⁴ That theory, it may be added, had a direct bearing on certain eschatological traditions which speak of 12 Mahdīs who would succeed the 'original' Qā'im.¹⁵

¹⁰ Al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-maḥāsīn*, ed. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī al-Muḥaddith, Tehran, 1370/1950-1, 3-15.

¹¹ Ibn Bābawayhi, *Kitāb al-khiṣāl*, Najaf, 1391/1971, 436-51.

¹² Al-Barqī, op. cit., 332 f.

¹³ 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'iri, Najaf, 1386/1966-7-1387/1967-8, II, 44 f.

¹⁴ See especially al-Kulīnī, op. cit., I, 328 ff., 525 ff. The Khīḍr-tradition appears on p. 525 f., and traditions on two concealments on p. 339 f.

¹⁵ See Ibn Bābawayhi, *Ikmāl al-dīn*, Tehran 1301/1883-4, 204, cited by al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* [= *Bihār*], [Persia], 1305/1887-8-1315/1897-8, XIII, 236; Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, ed. Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihirānī, Najaf, 1385/1965-6, 285, cited in *Bihār*, XIII, 237; Muḥsin al-Kāshānī, op. cit., 199 f. And cf. *Kitāb Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā*, in *al-Uṣūl al-arba'u mi'a*, MS Tehran University, no. 962, fol. 53b (where the Qā'im is said to be followed by 11 Mahdīs). Al-Majlisī (loc. cit.) suggests two possible interpretations of these traditions: the 12 Mahdīs might be the Prophet and the 11 Imāms, whose rule would follow that of the Qā'im; or else these Mahdīs might be the legatees (*awṣiyā'*) of the Qā'im, who would provide guidance to the community with the other Imāms who will have come back to earth (*raja'ū*).

Yet even after the compilation of al-Kulīnī's monumental work, scholars occasionally had to contend with internal resistance to Twelver Shī'ī tenets. This resistance did not as a rule stem from hard-liners who insisted on the concrete continuance of the imāmate in the person of the dead Imām's brother Ja'far; for reasons to which I shall return later, hardly anyone seems to have clamoured for an Imām here and now. The difficulty lay rather in the position of the Shī'ī *du'afā'*, who did not wish to antagonize the Sunnī majority by advancing odious theories, and in that of rank-and-file Shī'īs, who were puzzled by the novelty of the situation. Their unease is reflected in the introductions to three works written in the middle or latter half of the fourth/tenth century. The first is the *Kitāb al-ghayba* by al-Kulīnī's pupil Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nu'mānī (d. 360/971), which was completed in 342/953.¹⁶ Al-Nu'mānī complains that most Shī'īs of his generation are uncertain of the identity of the present Imām or have doubts as to his disappearance. He attributes these doubts to ignorance, to the pernicious influence of 'vain liars (*ahl al-zukhruf wa 'l-bāṭil*)', and to the attractions of worldly life and success, which draw people away from the path of truth.¹⁷ Al-Nu'mānī does not identify the 'vain liars' by name; but one can see what he is likely to have had in mind by consulting another work, the *Kifāyat al-athar fī 'l-nuṣūṣ 'alā 'l-a'imma 'l-ithnay 'ashar*. A sufficiency of traditions concerning the designation of the twelve Imams' of al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī al-Qummī (d. 381/991), one of Ibn Bābawayhi's pupils. In his introduction¹⁸ al-Khazzāz explains that he was impelled to write the work because some Shī'īs whose religious knowledge was weak or only moderate (or, whose Shī'ism was lukewarm and whose knowledge moderate) (*qawman min du'afā' al-shī'a wa-mutawassīṭihim fī 'l-'ilm*) had let themselves be swayed by Mu'tazilī arguments against the 12 Imāms. Some of these Shī'īs said that the delegation of authority (*naṣṣ*) to the Imāms could not be conclusively proved (*min jiha yuqta'u 'l-'udhr bihā*); others went further and claimed that there were no traditions on the authority of the Ṣaḥāba concerning the delegation of authority to the Imāms. Al-Khazzāz considers the correction of such fallacious views an urgent task.

The third and best-known work of this period on the subject of the *ghayba* is Ibn Bābawayhi's *Ikmāl (kamāl) al-dīn wa-itmām (tamām) al-ni'ma*. In the opening section of the book Ibn Bābawayhi reports that on his way back from a visit to the shrine of the eighth Imām, 'Alī al-Riḍā, he stayed in Naysābūr and found that many perplexed Shī'īs were turning to him with questions about the *ghayba*. That experience spurred him on to compose a work in which the truth about the subject would be revealed and elucidated.¹⁹

In attempting to prove the validity of the doctrine of the 12 Imāms, these

¹⁶ See al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, Tehran, 1318/1900-1, 2.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 4 f.

¹⁸ Al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, [Persia], 1305/1888, 289.

¹⁹ Ibn Bābawayhi, *op. cit.*, 3 ff.

early Twelver Shī'ī authors (closely followed by writers of later generations) relied on four main methods.

(a) *Arguments from the Qur'ān*. Qur'anic passages in which the number 12 occurs naturally became an object of interest for Shī'ī commentators. The fifth Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/732 or 117/735), for example, is said to have interpreted the verse, 'Twelve is the number of the months with God' (Qur'ān ix, 36), as referring to the 12 Imāms.²⁰ And the sixth Imām, Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765), is said to have declared: 'The night consists of 12 hours and so does the day; the year consists of 12 months; the Imāms are 12 in number and so are the guarantors (*nuqabā'*);²¹ 'Alī is one of 12 hours, and this is the meaning of the verse, "No, they have declared the hour to be a lie; we have prepared for their likes a burning fire" (Qur'ān xxv, 11)'.²²

(b) *Arguments from Shī'ī tradition*. The relevant traditions may be broadly divided into two categories: first, traditions according to which there existed already during the Prophet's lifetime several documents in which the names of the 12 Imāms were detailed. One of these documents is the tablet (*lawḥ*) which the Companion Jābir b. 'Abdallāh allegedly saw at Fāṭima's house.²³ Another is a scroll (*ṣaḥīfa*) given to 'Alī by the Prophet, which is said to have consisted of 12 sections, each sealed by a separate seal. The Prophet instructed 'Alī to break open the first seal and act in accordance with the instructions in the underlying section; then the process would be repeated with each succeeding Imām.²⁴ A third document, supposedly written 2,000 years before the creation of Adam, was allegedly retrieved by Ja'far al-Šādiq from the date of a palm-tree which he had planted. The document included the *shahāda*, as well as the names of the 12 Imāms.²⁵

The second category consists of numerous traditions in which the Prophet speaks of the 12 Imāms who will follow him. Many of these traditions are conveniently grouped together in al-Majlisī's *Bihār al-anwār*.²⁶ In some versions of the Ghadīr Khumm tradition²⁷ the Prophet refers to the imāmate of 'Alī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, and nine descendants of al-Ḥusayn.²⁸ The 12 Imāms are variously referred to as 'the rightly guided (*al-rāshidūn al-muhtadūn*)', 'those

²⁰ Al-Nu'mānī, op. cit., 41. See also al-Ṭūsī, op. cit., 96. The Shī'ī scholar Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'i expresses reservations about the soundness of this exegesis. See his *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ix, Tehran, 1379/1959-60, 286.

²¹ Referring either to the 12 Israelites mentioned in Qur'ān v, 12, or to the 12 Companions chosen by Muḥammad. See Ibn Bābawayhi, *Kitāb al-khiṣāl*, 463 f.

²² Al-Nu'mānī, op. cit., 40.

²³ *ibid.*, 29-31; Ibn Bābawayhi, *Ikmāl al-dīn*, 179 f.; the references in my article 'An unusual Shī'ī *isnād*', *Israel Oriental Studies*, v, 1975, p. 144, n. 10.

²⁴ Al-Nu'mānī, op. cit., 24.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 42.

²⁶ *Bihār*, ix, 120 ff. See also Ibn Bābawayhi, *Kitāb al-khiṣāl*, 445 ff.

²⁷ See the article 'Ghadīr Khumm', by L. Veccia Vaglieri, in *EI*, second ed. The most exhaustive treatment of the subject from a Shī'ī point of view is that of 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad al-Amīnī in his *al-Ghadīr fī 'l-kitāb wa 'l-sunna wa 'l-adab*, Tehran, 1372/1952-3.

²⁸ Al-Nu'mānī, op. cit., 33.

to whom the angels speak (*al-muḥaddathūn*), 'the legatees (*al-awṣiyā*)', and so forth.

(c) *Arguments from Sunnī tradition.* For obvious polemical reasons, it was especially important for Shī'ī authors to be able to buttress their doctrine of 12 Imāms by quoting Sunnī material. Particularly popular in this respect is the tradition in which the Prophet is quoted as declaring: 'There will be twelve successors (*khalīfa*) (or commanders, *amīr*) after my death, all of them from Quraysh'. This tradition, which exists in several variants, is usually quoted on the authority of Jābir b. Samura (d. 66/686), though 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar (d. 73/693) and other Companions are also cited.²⁹ Al-Khazzāz quotes this and similar traditions on the authority of Companions renowned for their pro-'Alid attitude, such as Salmān al-Fārisī,³⁰ Jābir b. 'Abdallāh,³¹ and Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān,³² but he also cites as authorities 'Umar, 'Uthmān, Abū Hurayra, and 'Ā'isha, all of whom are regarded by Shī'ī traditionists as fierce anti-'Alids.³³ The conclusion drawn by fourth/tenth century Shī'ī writers is clear: the authority of all 12 Imāms derives from a direct delegation of power by Muḥammad. When speaking about the successors, the Prophet could not have meant any temporal rulers (*mulūk*), since there have been many more than 12 such rulers from the time of 'Alī to the writers' present day; he must therefore have been referring to the Imāms, who are indeed his successors on earth.³⁴

(d) *Arguments from the Bible and Jewish tradition.* Reliance on Biblical passages and on Jewish and Christian tradition figured prominently in Muslim literature from the earliest period, despite varying degrees of opposition from within the Muslim camp.³⁵ The Shī'īs were not less active than other Islamic sects in searching for Biblical quotations—real or spurious—to promote the validity of a particular belief.³⁶ The doctrine of the 12 Imāms is no exception. Al-Nu'mānī, for instance, sets out to defend it by basing himself on *al-sifr al-awwal* (i.e. Genesis). He cites a statement by al-Ḥasan b. Sulaymān, a Jewish scholar from Arrajān, to the effect that Ishmael was also called Mād. This is a supposedly Hebrew word meaning 'the praised one (*muḥammad*)', and it is

²⁹ *ibid.*, 48 f.; Ibn Bābawayhi, *Ikmāl al-dīn*, 149–67; *idem*, *Kitāb al-khiṣāl*, 436–45; in general *Bihār*, ix, 128 ff. For contemporary Shī'ī works consult, e.g., 'Alī Yazdī al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib fī iḥbāt ḥujjat al-ghā'ib*, Tehran, 1351/1932–3, 75 ff.; Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn Āl Kāshif al-Ghitā', *Aṣl al-shī'a wa-uṣūluhā*, Najaf, 1369/1950, 99.

³⁰ Al-Khazzāz, *op. cit.*, 293 f., cited in *Bihār*, ix, 141–4.

³¹ Al-Khazzāz, *op. cit.*, 294–7, whence *Bihār*, ix, 145.

³² Al-Khazzāz, *op. cit.*, 305.

³³ *ibid.*, 298 ff. Al-Majlisī criticizes al-Khazzāz for 'mixing Imāmi traditions with those of the opponents', and declares that in the *Bihār* only reliable traditions are quoted (*Bihār*, i, 12).

³⁴ Al-Nu'mānī, *op. cit.*, 49. In Shī'ī traditions the Imāms are often referred to as *khulafā'*, or *khulafā' allāh fī ardīhi*. See, e.g., al-Kulīnī, *op. cit.*, i, 193 f.

³⁵ See F. Rosenthal, 'The influence of the Biblical tradition on Muslim historiography', in B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (ed.), *Historians of the Middle East*, London, 1962, 35–45; M. J. Kister, 'Ḥaddīthū 'an banī isrā'īla wa-lā ḥaraja', *Israel Oriental Studies*, ii, 1972, 215–39.

³⁶ For some examples see Kister, *art. cit.*, 222 f., 232, 233.

therefore also the Hebrew form of the Prophet's name.³⁷ Once it is established that Ishmael and Muḥammad share an identical name, it is easy to see how the same idea may be applied to Ishmael's sons and Muḥammad's descendants. And indeed, al-Ḥasan b. Sulaymān enumerates the names of the 12 sons of Ishmael³⁸ and explains that these also refer to the 12 Imāms.³⁹ When asked where (literally, in which *sūra*) these names occur, he (erroneously) mentions *Mishlē Sulaymān*, i.e. the Book of Proverbs.⁴⁰ As further evidence, al-Ḥasan also quotes the passage, 'I have heard your prayer for Ishmael. I have blessed him and will make him fruitful. I will multiply his descendants; he shall be father of twelve princes, and I will raise a great nation from him' (Gen. xvii, 20).⁴¹ Three other Jews subsequently confirm the genuineness of these quotations and support the interpretations given to them by al-Ḥasan b. Sulaymān.⁴²

Elsewhere it is claimed that quite a few Jews know that the names of the Imāms appear in the Torah; but these Jews refuse to acknowledge this publicly, either because they do not wish to admit the superiority of Islam, or because they fear the reaction of their co-religionists.⁴³

Other stories concerning Jewish approval of the notion of 12 Imāms go back to the time of 'Alī. In a typical anecdote, a Jew puts 'Alī's knowledge to the test by posing him various difficult questions. To the question, 'How many well-guided leaders (*imām hudā*) will there be after the Prophet?', 'Alī replies by mentioning the 12 Imāms. The Jew confirms that this is correct and embraces Islam.⁴⁴ In a similar story, a Jew shows 'Alī a book 'recorded

³⁷ In various traditions (usually on the authority of Ka'b al-Aḥbār), the Prophet's name in the ancient Scriptures (or in the Torah) is said to have been 'Mādh Mādh', meaning 'good, good' (al-Qāḍi 'Iyāḍ, *al-Shifā' bi-ta'rīf huqūq al-muṣṭafā*, Cairo, 1369/1950, I, 148; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, xvi, Cairo, 1374/1955, 79), or 'Mūdh Mūdh' (Ibrāhīm al-Bājūrī, *al-Mawāhib al-laduniyya 'alā 'l-shamā'il al-muḥammadiyya*, Cairo, 1301/1883-4, 213), or 'al-Ḥādd' (*Biḥār*, vi (unpaginated)), or 'Mād Mād' (al-Ḥā'irī, op. cit., 38, 45). Most of these forms derive from the Hebrew *me'od me'od* (Gen. xvii, 2, 6, 20). It is claimed that the letters constituting the name 'Mād Mād' have a combined numerical value of 92 (this would be true if the *alif* were doubled), and that this is also the combined numerical value of the word 'Muḥammad' (al-Ḥā'irī, op. cit., 38).

³⁸ See Gen. xxv, 13-16; cf. I Chron. i, 29-31.

³⁹ Al-Nu'mānī, op. cit., 49 f. The names of Ishmael's sons as they appear in this story attest to a considerable corruption of the original text. Thus Nebaioth is rendered 'Baḡūnith' (or 'Bāqūbith'), Qēdār becomes 'Qadū' ('Qaydawū'?), Adb'el is 'Ra'in' (or 'Dabirā'), etc. The corruption is somewhat less marked in a different tradition, on the authority of Ka'b al-Aḥbār, copied in the *Biḥār* (ix, 127) from the *Muqtaḍab al-athar* of Ibn 'Ayyāsh. Muslim authors in general seem to have been uncertain as to the correct form of the names of Ishmael's sons. Thus al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) points to the discrepancy between Ibn Ishāq's version and that of other sources. See his *Tārīkh*, ed. M. J. de Goeje and others, Leiden, 1879-1901, Prima Series, I, 351 f. The tradition about the 12 sons of Ishmael is quoted already in the *Tafsīr* of Ismā'il b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī (d. 128/745). See al-Muzaffar, *Dalā'il al-ṣiḍq*, II, Najaf, 1372/1953, 314; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Kashf al-asṭār 'an wajh al-ghā'ib 'an al-abṣār, sine loco*, 1318/1900-1, 106.

⁴⁰ Al-Nu'mānī, op. cit., 50.

⁴¹ *ibid.* The Arabic is preceded by a badly corrupted transliteration of the Hebrew original.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *Biḥār*, ix, 127, quoting from Ibn 'Ayyāsh's *Muqtaḍab al-athar*.

⁴⁴ Al-Nu'mānī, op. cit., 51 f.

in the handwriting of David (*masṭūr bi-khaṭṭ Dāwūd*), in which the 12 Imāms are mentioned.⁴⁵

In the view of Twelver Shī'ī doctors, belief in the *ghayba* of the last Imām is a direct corollary of the belief in 12 Imāms. A detailed defence of this position is developed in the works on the *ghayba*, and need not be elaborated here; the basic argument, however, is this: from the proposition that the line of Imāms ends with the twelfth it follows that the last Imām is alive (since mankind cannot remain without a guide); at the same time, he finds himself in grave danger from his many enemies. Although God will surely not allow the last Imām to be killed (since there will be no one to replace him), the Imām must nevertheless assume personal responsibility and must see to his own protection by remaining in hiding. In this context, traditions about the two *ghaybas* are of particular interest. Al-Nu'mānī who, it will be recalled, completed his *Kitāb al-ghayba* 13 years after the beginning of the 'greater' concealment, quotes a tradition on the authority of Ja'far al-Šādiq, according to which the first *ghayba* will also be the longer one.⁴⁶ But this tradition is immediately followed by others (also on the authority of Ja'far al-Šādiq): 'The Qā'im will undergo two *ghaybas*, one short and the other long';⁴⁷ or again, 'The Master of this Age (*ṣāhib hādihā 'l-amr*, i.e. the Qā'im) will undergo two *ghaybas*; during the first he will return to his people (*ahl*),⁴⁸ and during the second it will be said, "he has perished"'.⁴⁹ The impression gained from the discrepancy between the description of the respective lengths of the first and second *ghaybas* is that initially it was not quite clear which of the two would last longer; only later was it established that the second concealment (also known as *al-ghayba al-tāmma* 'the complete concealment')⁵⁰ would also be the longer one. It was then, too, that the reasons for the different degrees of concealment were elaborated. According to al-Sharīf al-Murtadā (d. 436/1044), the Imām used to appear before his adherents at the beginning of his concealment (i.e. during *al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*), concealing himself only from his enemies; only later, when danger to his life increased, did he have to hide from both followers and adversaries.⁵¹ Nevertheless, al-Murtadā maintains that it is not impossible for the Imām to appear before one of his adherents, provided the Imām has complete confidence in him.⁵²

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 54. Cf. al-Kulīnī, *op. cit.*, I, 529 f., 531 f.

⁴⁶ Al-Nu'mānī, *op. cit.*, 90, cited in *Biḥār*, XIII, 142.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* Cf. the somewhat vague formulation in a tradition of the Prophet: 'He [i.e. the Qā'im] will undergo two *ghaybas*, one of which will be longer than the other' (al-Khazzāz, *op. cit.*, 307).

⁴⁸ This is said by al-Majlisī to refer to his appearance before his closest associates (*khawāṣṣ mawālīhi wa-sufarā'ihī*), or to the fact that news about him will reach the people (*Biḥār*, XIII, 143).

⁴⁹ Al-Nu'mānī, *op. cit.*, 91.

⁵⁰ See e.g. al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī, *I'lām al-warā fī a'lām al-hudā*, ed. M. Mahdī al-Sayyid Ḥasan al-Khursān, Najaf, 1390/1970, 445; *Biḥār*, XIII, 142.

⁵¹ Al-Sharīf al-Murtadā, *Tanzīh al-anbiyā'*, Najaf, 1380/1961, 228.

⁵² *ibid.*, 233 f.

Twelver Shī'ī theologians based the belief in two *ghaybas* not only on Shī'ī traditions but also on the precedent allegedly established by various prophets, especially Abraham and Muḥammad. Abraham went into concealment first because of Nimrod and later because he feared the Egyptian ruler.⁵³ Muḥammad, together with his followers from the Banū Hāshim, had to find refuge in a ravine (*shī'b*)⁵⁴ and endure the boycott imposed by Quraysh; ⁵⁵ afterwards, during his flight to Medina, he was forced to hide in a cave.⁵⁶

Having followed the main stages in the growth of Ithnā-'asharī doctrine, there remains the question of origin; that is: to what extent can the traditions on which that doctrine is based be traced back to the period preceding the disappearance of the twelfth Imām?

The main point to bear in mind would seem to be that both the number 12 and the idea of *ghayba* are very early motifs in Islamic history. A partiality for the number 12 is a well-known feature of many ancient civilizations. The Biblical account of the 12 tribes of Israel and the Christian traditions about the 12 apostles of Christ are probably at the root of the Islamic preference for the number 12 to describe a body of leaders; the term *nuqabā'*, for instance, is used to refer not only to the 12 Israelites of Qur'ān v, 12 or the 12 representatives chosen by Muḥammad from among the Medinese,⁵⁷ but also to the 12 leaders of the secret organization which prepared the 'Abbāsid revolution.⁵⁸ Among the early *ghulāt* 'extremists', Abū Maṣṣūr al-'Ijlī (executed 121/738) claimed that he was the sixth of 12 prophets, the last of whom would be the Qā'im.⁵⁹

It is in this general context that the above-mentioned Sunnī traditions about the 12 successors must be viewed. These traditions had been in circulation long before the beginning of the 'lesser' concealment. They are to be found in the *Kitāb al-fitan* of Nu'aym b. Ḥammād (d. 228/844),⁶⁰ in the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870),⁶¹ and they probably go back much further. In his commentary on al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 923/1517) proffers the following possible explanations (reproduced here in order of appearance). (i) These traditions

⁵³ See Ibn Bābawayhi, *Ikmāl al-dīn*, 82 f.

⁵⁴ Often identified as the *Shī'b Abī Yūsuf*. See Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, III, Beirut, 1376/1957, 347.

⁵⁵ See 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf fī sharḥ al-sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Wakīl, III, Cairo, 1389/1969, 354.

⁵⁶ See al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, 61-3. See also Sa'id b. Hibat Allāh al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa 'l-jarā'ih*, Bombay, 1301/1883-4, 162.

⁵⁷ cf. above, p. 525, n. 21.

⁵⁸ See e.g. al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, Najaf, 1358/1939-40, III, 40 f., whence al-Shaybī, *al-Fikr al-shī'ī wa 'l-naza'āt al-ḡuḡiyya*, Baghdād, 1386/1966, 25.

⁵⁹ Al-Nawbakhtī, op. cit., 34.

⁶⁰ Cited by Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Malāḥim wa 'l-fitan*, Najaf, 1383/1963, 26, 147.

⁶¹ See A. J. Wensinck and J. P. Mensing (ed.), *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*, Leiden, 1936-64, I, 306, s.v. *ihny*.

refer to 12 rulers, in whose days the Muslim community was strong and united. Following that period, which ended with the accession of al-Walid b. Yazid (reigned 125–6/743–4), Islam was rent by strife and sedition. Though al-Qaṣṭallānī does not identify the 12 rulers by name, he may well have in mind the period of *al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidūn* and of those Umayyad caliphs whose reign was considered to be relatively stable and successful (i.e. Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān and his son Yazīd, ʿAbd al-Malik and his four sons, and ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz). (ii) These traditions adumbrate a situation in which 12 men of the same generation would each claim to be a legitimate ruler, thus causing a split in the community. Such a situation, says al-Qaṣṭallānī, occurred indeed in the fifth/eleventh century, when six persons vied for control in Spain, while the Fāṭimid ruler, the ʿAbbāsīd caliph, and various Khārījī and ʿAlid pretenders also staked their claim to rule. (iii) These traditions reflect the situation obtaining in the first Islamic century, up to the death in 101/720 of ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. During that period, considered by many as the golden age of Islam, there were 14 legitimate rulers (namely, *al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidūn*, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr, and the first eight Umayyad caliphs), but two of them, Muʿāwiya b. Yazīd (reigned Rabiʿ I–Dhū ʿl-Qaʿda 64/November 683–June 684) and Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (reigned Dhū ʿl-Qaʿda 64–Ramaḍān 65/June 684–April 685), are not to be included since their reigns were too short.⁶² The explanations given by Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676/1278) in his *Sharḥ ʿalā ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*⁶³ are not very different, and are likewise based on a literal interpretation of the number 12. The Ashʿarī al-Faḍl b. Rūzbihān (fl. beginning of tenth/sixteenth century), in his refutation of the Shīʿī interpretation of these traditions as presented by Ibn al-Muṭaḥhar al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325), suggests among other possibilities that the reference may be to 12 good rulers from Quraysh (*ṣulḥāʾ al-khulafāʾ*), who did not necessarily succeed each other. These are the five (!) ‘well-guided caliphs’,⁶⁴ ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr, ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, and five ʿAbbāsīd caliphs (whom he does not identify by name).⁶⁵ This last explanation, even more than some of al-Qaṣṭallānī’s comments, reflects an obvious anti-Umayyad tilt. In fact, it is not inconceivable that this tradition was originally aimed against the Umayyads, while upholding the right of Quraysh to rule.⁶⁶ At the same time, it was also quoted

⁶² Al-Qaṣṭallānī, *Irshād al-sārī li-sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, x, Būlāq, 1327/1909, 273. In practical terms, the only difference between (i) and (iii) lies in the replacement of Yazid and Hishām, two of ʿAbd al-Malik’s sons, by al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī and ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr.

⁶³ On the margin of al-Qaṣṭallānī’s *Irshād*, viii, Bulaq, 1326/1908, 5–7.

⁶⁴ Perhaps including al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī.

⁶⁵ Al-Muṣaḥḥar, op. cit., ii, 314 f. Al-Muṣaḥḥar (ibid., 315–18) rejects this and other interpretations given by al-Faḍl b. Rūzbihān. See also al-Nūri al-Ṭabarsī, op. cit., 94 ff.

⁶⁶ A good example of such an anti-Umayyad, pro-Quraysh attitude is provided by al-Maqrizī’s *al-Nizāʾ wa ʿl-takhḥuṣṣum fīmā bayna banī Umayya wa-banī Hāshim (passim)*. In a Shīʿī tradition of a somewhat different character, the Prophet declared that after his death the community would come under the rule of 12 ‘erring Imāms (*imām ḡalālā*)’, two of them from Quraysh (referring probably to Abū Bakr and ʿUmar) and 10 from the Banū Umayya. See Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarsī, *Kutāb al-ihṭijāj*, ii, Najaf, 1386/1966–7, 4.

as evidence for the disturbances which would follow the death of the twelfth caliph (or *amīr*), and which are reminiscent of the confusion which would precede the Day of Judgement. This comes out especially in the variant, 'There will be twelve successors . . . and then there will be turmoil (*thumma yakūnu 'l-harj*)'.⁶⁷ It is therefore only natural that this tradition should have found its way into eschatological works, such as Nu'aym's *Kitāb al-fitan*, the *Kitāb al-mahdī* of the *Sunan* of Abū Dā'ūd (d. 275/888), or the *Kitāb al-fitan* of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892).

As for the *ghayba*, it is enough to recall the belief that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya was hiding in the mountain of Raḍwā, or the claim, attributed to the followers of 'Abdallāh b. Saba', that 'Alī had not died,⁶⁸ in order to realize how early this idea had taken root among various 'extremist' Shī'ī sects. In the first two centuries of 'Abbāsīd rule, some of the main proponents of the *ghayba* theory were the various *wāqifī* Shī'ī sects (e.g. the Nāwūsiyya or the Mamṭūra), whose professed aim was to prove that a particular Imām was also the last one, that he had gone into concealment, and that he would reappear as Mahdī. At the same time, belief in the future *ghayba* of an as yet unnamed Imām persisted among the *gaṭ'iyya* (who were the forerunners of the Ithnā-'ashariyya). Works entitled *Kitāb al-ghayba* are attributed to Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq al-Aḥmarī al-Nihāwandī (fl. middle of third/ninth century),⁶⁹ to al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭā'inī al-Kūfī (who was a contemporary of the eighth Imām, 'Alī al-Riḍā),⁷⁰ to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Naysābūrī (d. 260/874),⁷¹ and others. Of these authors, al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Baṭā'inī was reportedly a *wāqifī*.⁷² Though their works are lost, one may assume that they included traditions on the disappearance and subsequent reappearance of the last Imām.

Even the belief in two concealments did not originate with the Ithnā-'ashariyya. After the death of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, one group among his followers claimed that he had not died but had merely disappeared, that he would reappear and be recognized, only to disappear again before finally emerging as the Qā'im.⁷³ That group based its claim on traditions that the Qā'im would disappear twice.⁷⁴ One such tradition, on the authority of Muḥammad al-Bāqir, is said to have been included by al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb

⁶⁷ cf. Wensinck and Mensing (ed.), op. cit., VII, 83, s.v. *hrj*.

⁶⁸ See the recent discussion by J. van Ess, op. cit., 28 ff.; *idem*, *Das Kitāb an-Nakṭ des Naẓẓām und seine Rezeption im Kitāb al-Futū des Ḡāhiz*, Göttingen, 1972, 52 ff.; *idem*, 'Das Kitāb al-irḡā' des Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya', *Arabica*, XXI, 1, 1974, 32 ff.

⁶⁹ See Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, Najaf, 1355-7/1936-8, Tehran, 1360/1941 ff., XVI, p. 74, no. 371.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, XVI, p. 76, no. 382.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, XVI, p. 78, no. 395.

⁷² *ibid.*, XVI, p. 76, no. 382. According to al-Kishshī's *Rijāl*, however (ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥusaynī, Najaf, c. 1964, 344-6), the *wāqifī* was al-Ḥasan's father, 'Alī al-Baṭā'inī, who believed that al-Riḍā was the last Imām.

⁷³ See al-Nawbakhtī, op. cit., 79 f.; Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh, op. cit., 106 f.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

al-Zarrād (d. 224/839) in his *Kitāb al-mashyakha*.⁷⁵ According to that tradition there will be two concealments, one long and the other short.⁷⁶ A similar notion may be detected in the case of a group which claimed after the death of the seventh Imām, Mūsā al-Kāzim (d. 183/799), that he had been resurrected, but that he was in hiding pending his reappearance as the Qā'im.⁷⁷ Al-Kāzim might thus be said to have gone into concealment twice: first through temporary death and later by hiding.⁷⁸

Clearly, then, the sources on which Twelver Shī'ism drew had been in existence long before the 'lesser' *ghayba*. These sources merely had to be brought into line with the nascent Ithnā-'asharī dogma. This was achieved mainly through a process of reinterpretation of existing material. (The Ithnā-'asharī interpretation of the tradition on the 12 successors is an obvious example.) Twelver Shī'ī jurisconsults, however, could not be content with such a view of the origins of their faith; by projecting their doctrine backwards they sought to prove that specifically Ithnā-'asharī beliefs had been held by the Imāmiyya prior to the 'period of confusion (*ḥayra*)' (which is the term used to describe the time following the disappearance of the twelfth Imām).⁷⁹ Ibn Bābawayhi, for example, maintains that Twelver Shī'ī traditions appear in *al-Uṣūl al-arba'u mi'a*, which were written down by the followers of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and of other Imāms.⁸⁰ Similarly, al-Nu'mānī wishes to 'put an end to all argument and remove all doubts' concerning the validity of Twelver Shī'ī doctrine by pointing out that traditions about the 12 Imāms appear already in the *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, considered by many Shī'īs to have been composed by 'Alī's follower Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī al-Āmirī.⁸¹ While such claims are nominally correct, it must be remembered that the names of the 12 Imāms do not appear in these sources. *Al-Uṣūl al-arba'u mi'a* contain a tradition about 11 (!) unnamed Imāms, the last of whom would be the Qā'im,⁸² and a saying by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq to the effect that after the Prophet there will be seven Imāms, the last of whom will be the Qā'im.⁸³ As for the *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays*, serious doubts as to its authenticity persist among Shī'īs and non-

⁷⁵ cf. Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihirānī, op. cit., xxi, p. 69, no. 3995.

⁷⁶ See al-Ṭabarsī, *I'lām al-warā*, 443 f., cited in *Biḥār*, xiii, 99 f.

⁷⁷ Al-Nawbakhtī, op. cit., 68; Sa'd b. Abdallāh, op. cit., 90.

⁷⁸ In an Imāmi tradition, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq says explicitly that al-Kāzim will disappear twice (*inna li-Abi 'l-Ḥasan ghaybatayn*), so that some men will claim that he has died. In fact, says al-Ṣādiq, Mūsā al-Kāzim will not die until he appoints a legatee (al-Ṭūsī, op. cit., 38).

⁷⁹ Note the complete title of Ibn Bābawayhi's work: *Kitāb ikmāl al-dīn wa-itmām al-ni'ma fī iḥbāt al-ghayba wa-kashf al-ḥayra*.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 13. See also al-Ṭabarsī, op. cit., 443; and cf. the introduction to al-Barqī's *Kitāb al-mahāsīn* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Muḥaddith, p. *kāf-alif*.

⁸¹ Al-Nu'mānī, op. cit., 47.

⁸² *Kitāb Abi Sa'id 'Abbād al-Uṣfurī*, in *al-Uṣūl al-arba'u mi'a*, fol. 10a.

⁸³ *Kitāb Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā al-Ḥaḍramī*, in *al-Uṣūl al-arba'u mi'a*, fol. 53b. As it stands, this sounds like an Ismā'īlī tradition. The Ithnā-'asharī version of this and similar sayings is that Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is the first of the seven last Imāms. Cf. al-Ṭūsī, op. cit., 36.

Shī'is alike.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the possibility of later additions cannot be entirely ruled out. An obvious example of such an addition is provided by verses attributed to al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī (d. 173/789), in which the names of the 12 Imāms are spelled out.⁸⁵

While the reasons for the alleged disappearance of the twelfth Imām at a particular moment in the history of Shī'ism may never become fully known, a few points can be made with some certainty. There is, first, evidence in support of the Ithnā-'asharī argument that the 'Abbāsid persecutions had become intolerable. The respite granted the Shī'is after al-Mutawakkil's reign of terror proved short-lived. During the reigns of al-Mu'tazz (252-5/866-9) and al-Mu'tamid (256-79/870-92), the Imāms and their followers once more found themselves under mounting pressure, and Ithnā-'asharī claims that the Imām's life was often at peril might well be accepted at face value.⁸⁶ Secondly, these persecutions coincided with a heightened feeling of despondency among Imāmī Shī'is who (unlike many Zaydīs) had despaired of gaining ascendancy by radical means. For them, the disappearance of the Imām held obvious political and doctrinal attractions. It in due course enabled the Imāmīs to recognize and co-operate with the pro-Shī'ī Buwayhid régime, without sacrificing their loyalty to their Imām.⁸⁷ Such co-operation could in turn bring them closer to the centre of power. By proclaiming their loyalty to the Buwayhids, they could afford to be more outspoken in demanding their rights; the violent clashes between Imāmī Shī'is and their adversaries during that period only prove how self-confident they had become.⁸⁸ By strengthening their hold on sensitive financial and administrative positions they may have hoped both to reap advantages from the existing form of government, and ultimately to undermine Sunnism from within.⁸⁹ Finally, with the removal of a single, autocratic authority the way was opened for a much freer flow of ideas and thoughts, to which the flowering of Shī'ī literature and doctrine bears eloquent witness.

For these and possibly other reasons, the living and present Imām had to

⁸⁴ See Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, *Rijāl*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-'Ulūm, Najaf, 1381/1961, 83; Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, Halle, 1889-90, II, 10 f.

⁸⁵ Al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī, *Divān*, ed. Shākir Ḥādī Shakar, Beirut, 1966, 355-69.

⁸⁶ See D. Sourdél, 'La politique religieuse des successeurs d'al-Mutawakkil', *SI*, XIII, 1960, 12 ff.

⁸⁷ See the discussion in W. Montgomery Watt, art. cit., 119-21; C. Cahen, 'Buwayhids', in *EI*, second ed., II (in particular pp. 1350-2); *idem*, 'La changeante portée sociale de quelques doctrines religieuses', *L'élaboration de l'Islam. Colloque de Strasbourg, 12-14 juin 1959*, Paris, 1961, 16.

⁸⁸ cf. H. Laoust, 'La pensée et l'action politiques d'al-Māwardī (364-450/974-1058)', *REI*, XXXVI, 1, 1968, 43 ff.; *idem*, 'Les agitations religieuses à Baghdād aux IV^e et V^e siècles de l'Hégire', in D. S. Richards (ed.), *Islamic civilisation 950-1150*, Oxford, Cassirer, 1973, 169-85.

⁸⁹ cf. L. Massignon, 'Recherches sur les Shī'ites extrémistes à Bagdad à la fin du troisième siècle de l'Hégire', *ZDMG*, XCII, 1938, 378-82; Cahen, loc. cit.

give way to a hidden being, on whom all the messianic hopes and yearnings of a long-suffering minority could be focused. The doctrinal ground for this momentous event had been well laid in previous generations; hence the transition from Imāmiyya to Ithnā-'ashariyya proved a relatively smooth and natural process.