

Little is written about Shi'a Imams in English, especially the Imams after al-Sadiq (as) with the exception of the Twelfth Imam, al-Mahdi (aj). This short work sheds some light on the early life of Imam Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hadi (as) from his birth to his appointment and to his displacement to Samarra. It explores some less known aspects of the historical context of his life and especially tries to shed some new light on the topic of Inquisition (al-Mihnah).

THE EARLY LIFE OF IMAM AL-HADI

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Little is written about Shi'a Imams in English, especially the Imams after al-Ṣadiq (a) except for the Twelfth Imam, al-Mahdi. In this short work, I try to shed some light on the early life of Imam Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hādi (a) from his birth to his appointment and to his displacement to Samarra.

I

His Parents

During the time of Caliph al-Ma'mūn (d. 218/833¹), two Iranian brothers by the names Muhammad and 'Umar, from a village in Kerman called Rokhaji² were in close contact with al-Hādi's father, Imam al-Jawād (a) (d. 220/835), though in opposite directions. Both these brothers rose to high positions in the Abbasid court. One of them, 'Umar ibn al-Faraj al-Rokhaji,³ was installed by several Abbasid caliphs as the minister of what I call dirty jobs of the court, things that no noble man would ever do including destruction of the holy shrine of Imam al-Husain (a). The other brother, Muhammad ibn al-Faraj al-Rokhaji, was so much a noble man who became one of the closest associates of the Imams al-Riḍā (a), al-Jawād (a) and al-Hādi (a) in addition of his high profile jobs in the administration including the governorship of Egypt during the reign of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 247/861).

'Umar's animosity to al-Jawād (a) reached the extent that he tried or administered poisoning him during his term of office as the governor of Mecca and Medina. He was convinced neither by al-Jawād's arguments nor by any divinely granted sign he saw from him. He viewed all those signs as magic or sorcery, which the Imam's simpleton followers took as a sign of his *Imamah*.

Ibn Hamzah al-Ṭusi reports from him saying,

¹ The first date refers to the Islamic lunar calendar and the second date refers to the Gregorian calendar.

² Ali al-Burūjerdī, *Ṭarā'if al-Maqāl*, vol. 2, p. 176. (Qum: The Library of Ayatollah Mar'ashi, 1410)

³ Attributed to Rokhaji

I saw something from al-Jawād that had my brother Muhammad seen it he would have lost faith⁴. I was with him in Medina one day when food was brought for us. He said, refrain from eating. I said, may my father be your ransom, has a knowledge come to you from the unseen? He said, bring me the baker. When the baker was presented before him he rebuked him saying, who ordered you to poison me with this food? He replied, may I be your ransom, such and such commanded me.⁵

'Umar was always critical of al-Jawād's claim on the inspired knowledge, but he had no choice but to treat him with respect because of the latter's position with the caliph. Al-Mas'ūdi reports that,

Once 'Umar ibn al-Faraj and al-Jawād (a) were sitting on the shores of the Tigris River when he said to al-Jawād (a) reprehensibly, "Your followers claim that you have the knowledge of whatever is in the Tigris." Al-Jawād (a) replied, "Would God the Almighty have the power to bestow that knowledge to a gnat?" 'Umar replied, "Yes, of course." Al-Jawād (a) said, "I am nobler in His eyes than a gnat."⁶

Muhammad ibn al-Faraj, however, was diagonally contrary to his brother. He not only believed in al-Jawād's knowledge and deferred to him, but also had become one of the most trusted of his companions. This was expressed in the occasion of al-Jawād's marriage to al-Hadi's mother. Al-Mas'ūdi reports from him saying,

Once Abu Ja'far al-Jawād (a) summoned me and informed me that a slave trader had arrived with a caravan bringing with him a few slaves. He then handed me a pouch of sixty dinars and asked me to go and buy a slave girl that he described for me her countenance, her dress and her costume jewelry. I went and bought her with the money he had given me and it was exactly her price. That girl later became the mother of Abu al-Hassan al-Hādī (a) and her name was Jumanah.⁷

⁴ He means that he would have regarded al-Jawād (a) to have the knowledge of the unseen and for that reason he would be categorized as a disbeliever in Islam.

⁵ Ibn Hamzah al-Tūsi, *al-Thāqib fi al-Manāqib*, p. 517. (Qum: Ansāriyān, 1412)

⁶ Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas'ūdi, *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, p. 227. (Qum: Ansāriyān, 1384)

⁷ Ibid. p. 228.

Almost all other sources, however, have recorded her name as Sumānah,⁸ which is probably more accurate. Despite being a Berber slave girl from Morocco, Sumānah was deep in spiritual knowledge and, based on a report from the same Muhammad, she was safe from the whispers of Satan.

Muhammad ibn al-Faraj together with Ali ibn Mahziyār report from al-Hādi (a) saying,

‘My mother had knowledge of my position and she is of the people of Paradise; no rejected demon could approach her ... and she did not deviate from [the qualities of] the mothers of the Truthful and the Righteous.’⁹

I will talk about Ali ibn Mahziyār and his brother Ibrāhīm later, but a point worthy of notice in this narration is the way al-Hādi (a) praises his mother as having the knowledge of his position. The knowledge of the position of the Imam was something that even many close relatives and associates of the Imams did not have. They may have believed in them as Imams or followed them as leaders or respected them as descendants of the Prophet, however, knowledge of their position was different from all these. In many other narrations knowledge of their position has been used as a high spiritual merit and as a statement of admiration.

II

His Birth

There are two different accounts about the date of al-Hādi's birth; Rajab of 214/829¹⁰ and Dhu al-Hijjah of 212/828; however, since the latter date is reported by the majority of the sources¹¹ we would rely on that. Based on this account and knowing that al-Jawād (a) was born in 195/811, he should have been only seventeen years old when his first

⁸ Al-Sheikh Abū ‘Abdillāh al-Mufīd, *al-Muqni’ah*, p. 485. (Beirut: Dār al-Mufīd, 1993); al-Sheikh Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Ṭūsi, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, vol. 6, p. 92. (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyyah, 1390)

⁹ *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, p. 228. The Truthful and the Righteous are the translation of *al-siddīqīn wa al-ṣāliḥīn* which are two technical Quranic terms.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Al-Muqni’ah*, p. 484.

son was born and this was three years before he consummated his marriage with Umm al-Faḍl, daughter of the caliph al-Ma'mūn.¹²

The marriage between Umm al-Faḍl and al-Jawād (a) was made by the caliph al-Ma'mūn as soon as he arrived in Baghdad in 204/820. Al-Ma'mūn honoured al-Jawād (a) immensely as he had apparently done with his father. Thus, right on his arrival he summoned Imam al-Jawād (a) from Medina while he was only nine years old¹³ and offered her daughter to him for marriage. Rejecting the caliph's offer would have been an unforgivable sin and would have had dire consequences for the Imam and his followers, however, obviously the marriage could not have been consummated at that young age and al-Jawād (a) returned to Medina leaving Umm al-Faḍl in Baghdad.

It was during this Medina period that Imam al-Hādī was born from Sumānah in the outskirts of Medina in an estate of his grandfather Imam Mūsa al-Kāzīm (a) called Ṣaryā.¹⁴ If this was in 212/828 it was then three years before al-Jawād (a) was summoned to Baghdad again in 215/831. A tradition in this context confirms the opinion of the majority who put the birth of al-Hādī (a) in the year 212/828 against 214/830. Al-Mas'ūdi reports that when al-Jawād (a) was summoned to Baghdad he asked al-Hādī (a) and his brother Mūsa what gift they wanted him to bring for them from Iraq.¹⁵ This narration shows that both al-Hādī and his brother Mūsa al-Mubārqa' were born before 215/831 and were of an age that they could talk.

Al-Ma'mūn's decision to summon al-Jawād (a) in 215/831 made many followers of the Imam apprehensive of the caliph's intentions. Apparently, they never believed that the change of heart of the caliph regarding al-Riḍa (a) and his son al-Jawād (a) was anything more than a political device. This assumption was strengthened after al-Ma'mūn had ordered his army to change the green attire for the black in 204/820 after entering Baghdad. He had previously chosen green which was an emblem of the Family of the Prophet after appointing al-Riḍa (a) as his heir apparent; and now he was going back to the emblem of Abbasid's after the Imam's demise.

¹² Ja'far Murtaḍā al-ʿĀmilī, *Al-Ḥayāt al-Sīyāsiyyah li al-Imam al-Jawād (a)*, vol. 1, p. 79. (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Islāmi li al-Dirāsāt, 1985)

¹³ Al-Sheikh Abū ʿAbdillāh al-Mufīd, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, vol. 2, p. 284. (Beirut: Mu'assasatu Āl al-Bayt, 1993).

¹⁴ Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib al-ʿAbī Ṭālib*, vol. 4, p. 382. (Qum: al-Maktabat al-Ḥaydariyyah, 1432)

¹⁵ *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, p. 228

A report by Kulayni¹⁶ expresses such concerns for the life of al-Jawād (a) during annunciation (*naṣṣ*) of al-Hādī's Imamah. He reports from Ismā'īl ibn Mihrān¹⁷ that he said to al-Jawād (a),

I fear for you in this journey, so to whom goes the Command after you? He turned his face to me smilingly and said, "It is not the way you think; disappearance is not in this year."

Interestingly, in this narration Ismā'īl puts together two different incidents of five years apart and reports them together. He continues,

Later when he was moved out for the second time to go to al-Mu'tasim I went to him and said, "May I be your ransom, you are going out so to whom goes the Command after you?" He cried until his beard was wet; then looked at me and said, "In this trip there is fear; the Command after me goes to my son Ali."¹⁸

At any rate, on the arrival of al-Jawād in Baghdad, al-Ma'mūn had moved out from the capital to fight against the Romans and al-Jawād had to travel to Tikrit to meet the caliph. It was in this trip that his marriage with Umm al-Faḍl was consummated with the permission of al-Ma'mūn and the couple resided in Baghdad until the hajj season. Thereafter, al-Jawād (a) travelled to Medina accompanied by Umm al-Faḍl and resided there for almost another five years during which al-Ma'mūn passed away.¹⁹

Caliph al-Ma'mūn died in 218/833 near Tartus in present day Turkey and was buried there. He was on a military venture against the Roman emperor when he was struck by an unidentified fatal illness and passed away.²⁰

¹⁶ Except in rare cases, throughout this text I don't put *al-* before Persian names and nicknames which are otherwise used with *al-* in Arabic.

¹⁷ Ismā'īl ibn Mihrān was one of the greatest scholars of his time and had authored several books in most of which he had compiled traditions from Imam al-Sādiq (a). He was a close associate of Imam a-Riḍā (a) and was very much concerned about the fate of al-Jawād (a).

¹⁸ Muhammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulayni, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 323. (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1363)

¹⁹ Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazari, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 6, p. 417. (Beirut: Dār al-Šādīr, 1965),

²⁰ Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Mas'ūdi, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, p. 522 (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-'Āsriyyah, 2005)

His brother al-Mu'tasim was pledged as the Caliph on the same day. He was a tough and strong man who reportedly and exaggeratedly could break the arm of a man between his fingers! As soon as assuming power, al-Mu'tasim decided to enforce his order in all his territory and to do that he took several strides.

Firstly, he decided to continue the policy of unifying the belief. Like his brother he was siding with the Mu'tazilites in their views, especially on the issue of the Createdness of the Qur'an. He decided to put an end to that dispute by severely punishing anyone who opposed the views of the court. In 219/834 he imprisoned Ahmad ibn Hanbal for believing in the primordial eternity of the Qur'an. According to Ibn al-Athīr, Ahmad ibn Hanbal was heavily lashed until he lost his consciousness and his skin fell apart.²¹ Ibn Hanbal was only the most prominent among many others.

Secondly, he wanted to put an end to rebellion of the Iranians led by Bābak Khorradīn who was a big threat to the caliphate since 201/817. Towards that cause, he appointed Afshīn, another Iranian officer, to finish Bābak. Afshīn succeeded to capture the latter who was eventually killed by the order of al-Mu'tasim.²²

Thirdly, he decided to move the capital from Baghdad which was strewn with strife between his troops and the citizens of Baghdad. So he moved the capital to Samarra in 221/836 along with all his troops and the nobility, who moved in one after another.

Fourthly, he decided to put his mind in peace regarding al-Jawād and his followers. So in 220/836²³ al-Mu'tasim who was very much apprehensive of al-Jawād's growing popularity summoned him to Baghdad. Al-Jawād (a) left al-Hādī (a) and his mother in Medina and travelled to Baghdad with Umm al-Faḍl. Since the caliph had insinuated that he wanted al-Jawād (a) to settle in Baghdad, leaving al-Hādī (a) and his mother behind in Medina was a meaningful decision by the Imam.

Al-Jawād's residence in Baghdad did not last long. He arrived on 28th Muharram 220/836 and died on 29th Dhu al-Qi'dah of the same year making his stay in Bagdad ten months altogether.²⁴ According to al-Mas'ūdi he was poisoned by Umm al-Faḍl on

²¹ *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 6, p. 445.

²² *Ibid.* pp. 447-451.

²³ 219/835 according to al-Mas'ūdi's *Murūj al-Dhahab*, p. 524

²⁴ *Kuāb al-Irshād*, vol. 2, p. 295

behest of al-Mu'tasim and instigations of her brother Ja'far.²⁵ Muhammad ibn Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshi also believed that he was poisoned; however, he provides a completely different account of the story²⁶. It is probably due to such discrepancy that al-Mufīd hesitates and states that he has not been able to establish any report testifying to al-Jawād's (a) poisoning.²⁷

Al-Jawād (a) was 25 years old when he passed away and left behind two sons, Ali al-Hādi (a) and Mūsa al-Mubargha', and two daughters, Fātima and Amāmah,²⁸ all of them from Sumānah.

III

Imam Al-Hādi's (a) Appointment

The Shi'a had already experienced a big crisis after the demise of al-Riḍa (a) due to the young age of al-Jawād (a). Assuming the position of Imam was not like a royal transfer of kingdom which needed only the right blood relation. It was a spiritual and religious leadership which needed inspired knowledge above anything else and hence al-Jawād (a) was vehemently examined and tested by Shi'a scholars before they would acknowledge his position. They did not rule out the possibility of a young boy having inspired knowledge, since the Qur'an testifies to such a phenomenon about Jesus and John the Baptist (19:12), however, they needed to verify the matter.

All in all, to acknowledge someone as the Imam, the Shi'a scholars usually needed two proofs. The first was the *naṣṣ* or annunciation from the previous Imam; and the second was examination of the new Imam to identify the signs of inspired knowledge in them. Al-Hādi (a) was only eight years old when his father passed away; hence he needed both the above in the strongest sense.

²⁵ *Iḥbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, p. 227.

²⁶ Muhammad ibn Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshi, *Kitāb al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 320. (Tehran: al-Maktabat al-Islāmīyah, 1380)

²⁷ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, vol. 2, p. 295.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Al-Jawād (a), knowing the intentions of al-Mu'tasim commanding him to migrate to Baghdad, asked his representative Muhammad ibn al-Faraj to hand the *khums* to his son Ali al-Hādī (a). Although this was a sign of his successorship,²⁹ but this was not enough a sign for the Shi'a scholars and notables.

The problem with *naṣṣ* was that it should have been concealed from the caliph and those who were not regarded as insiders but at the same time it should have been revealed to the Shi'a in a way that a good number of their notables would have been informed without the news leaking to the caliph spies.

Kulayni and al-Mufīd report two almost identical narrations containing *naṣṣ* on al-Hādī (a); Kulayni adds the text of a written will as well. After citing the two narrations, al-Mufīd explains that the narrations in this regard are profuse and plenty and mentioning them would only lengthen the book, since the consensus of all Shi'a scholars over al-Hādī (a) without anyone rivaling his position would leave no need detailing the texts of narrations.

I wished al-Mufīd would have decided otherwise and would have included all those narrations in his book because most of them are now lost to us. Fortunately, however, some of them are preserved in al-Mas'ūdi's *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah* and other sources and will be examined later.

At any rate, one account of *naṣṣ* is the aforementioned narration of Ismā'īl ibn Mihrān where the Imam announces that the Command after him would go to his son Ali.³⁰ This *naṣṣ* was issued in Medina just before the last departure of al-Jawād (a) to Baghdad.

Kulayni and from him al-Mufīd report another *naṣṣ* which is issued in Baghdad just a few days before the demise of al-Jawād (a) during his illness. The narration is reported from al-Khayrānī, apparently a son of Khayrān who was in the service of al-Riḍā (a) and continued to be in service of al-Jawād (a) and al-Hādī (a) after him.³¹ Three important figures are mentioned in this narration. First is Khayrān the father of al-Khayrānī; the narration implies that he was a *wakīl* (proxy) of al-Jawād (a) as he was of

²⁹ *Manāqibu āl-e Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 4, p. 389.

³⁰ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 323

³¹ Al-Sheikh al-Hasan, *al-Taḥrīr al-Ṭāwūsi*, P. 184, ft. (Qum: The Library of Ayatollah Mar'ashi, 1411)

his father's and was highly trusted by the Imam. The second figure is the aforementioned Muhammad ibn al-Faraj; he seems to have had a high respect among the Shi'a, and his house was a safe place for Shi'a gatherings despite the tough security situation.

However, the most controversial figure in this narration is Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Īsā al-Ash'ari. He later became one of the most prominent Shi'a scholars and the leading figure of the hadith school of Qum. His behavior in this narration is very dubious and does not live up to his personality and fame. It is for this reason that Ayatollah Khoi has undermined the reliability of al-Khayrāni to protect Ahmad's integrity.³² However, it is very difficult to accept that Kulayni and al-Mufid were not aware of this issue and ignored the highly problematic stance of Ahmad in the said circumstances. One explanation is that Ahmad at the time was very young. Although the date of his demise is not known, but we know that he took part in the funeral of al-Barghi in 280/894, sixty years after this gathering took place. It is conceivable to have a young man having his own reasons and justifications for a stance that seems to be unacceptable.

In any case, al-Khayrāni reports,

My father was attached to the house of Abū Ja'far (al-Jawād (a)), so as to be of service in whatever he was entrusted with. Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Īsā used to come every night just before daybreak, to learn the news of Abū Ja'far's illness. There was a messenger who used to go between Abū Ja'far and my father and whenever he arrived, Ahmad would stand up and go, and my father would confer privately with him. One night, I went there [when the messenger came] and Ahmad left the room and my father conferred privately with the messenger; but Ahmad returned and stood where he could hear what they were saying. The messenger said to my father, "Your Master sends you his greetings, and says to you, 'I am going to pass away, and [after me] the affair will fall to my son, 'Alī. He has (a right) over you after me as I have (a right) over you after my father.'" Then the messenger went away, and Ahmad came back to his place and said to my father, "What was it that he said to you?" He said: "All good." He said, "I heard what he said. Why do you conceal it?" And he repeated what he had heard. Then my father said to him, "God has made what you have done forbidden to you, when He says:

³² Ayatollah Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khoi, *Mu'jam Riāl al-Hadīth*, vol. 3, p. 88. (Najaf: Mu'assasat al-Imam al-Khoi)

"And do not spy" (49:12). Keep to yourself what you have witnessed; perhaps we will need it someday. Take strict care that you do not speak it out until its time. In the morning, my father wrote out ten copies of the message (from the Imām), sealed them and handed them to the ten prominent men of the sect, and said, "If the moment of death occurs to me before I ask them back from you, break them open and act according to what is in them." When Abū Ja'far (a) passed away, my father told me that he would not leave his house till four hundred men had (come and) declared their certainty (over the Imāmah) at his hand. Then the heads of the sect gathered in the house of Muhammad ibn al-Faraj and discussed this matter. Muhammad ibn al-Faraj wrote to my father informing him of their gathering in his house, and that, if it were not for fear of it becoming known, he would have brought them to him. He asked my father to go to him. My father rode on his mount and went to him and found the crowd gathered at his house. They said to my father, "What do you say about this matter?" My father said to those in whose hands were the copies he had made, "Bring out the copies." And they brought them out. He said to them, "This is what I was ordered to do." Some of them said, "We would like to have another witness in this matter with you." He said to them, "God, to Whom belong Might and Majesty, will give you (another) one. This man, Abū Ja'far al-Ash'arī, will be witness for me that I heard this message;" and he asked him to bear witness to what he knew. But Ahmad denied that he had heard anything of this, and my father challenged him to do mutual cursing. When my father had established the truth for him, he said, "Indeed, I heard this, but it was an honour which I should have liked to be for a man from the Arabs, not for a man from the non-Arabs ('*ajam*')."³³ The crowd did not disperse until they had all believed the truth (of the matter).³⁴

As I said before, al-Mufīd had regarded mentioning all accounts of *naṣṣ* on al-Hādī (a) to be unnecessary. However, fortunately, some of what al-Mufīd has left out is recorded by others. One of those accounts is reported by his contemporary Husayn ibn Abdul Wahhāb in his famous book *Uyūn al-Mu'jizāt*. It is a report from the aforementioned

³³ Al-Mufīd gives the following in place of this sentence: He was frightened of that and then admitted: "Verily, I heard this, but it was an honour which I should have liked to be for one of the men from the Arabs. But as a result of the challenge to an oath of destruction, there is no way of concealing testimony." (*Kitāb al-Irshād*, Translated by: I. K. A. Howard, p.498)

³⁴ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 324.

Ali ibn Mahzīyār. Husayn reports this account from a lost book of the renowned 'Abdullah al-Himyari which was probably a source of al-Mufīd as well. Al-Himyari is the author of many books including the famous *Qurb al-Isnād* which is his only extant work.

Ibn Mahzīyār was born to a Christian family in Hindijān on the shores of the Persian Gulf. He converted to Islam at a young age and later on resided in Ahwāz hence his attribute as Ahwāzi. He became one of the most prominent Shi'i scholars and one of the most trusted proxies of al-Riḍā (a), al-Jawād (a), al-Hādī (a) and al-Askari (a). On his journey to Marv, al-Riḍā (a) had a sojourn in Ahwāz; soon the people of Ahwāz built a mosque in the place where he had stayed. Later Ibn Mahzīyār willed to be buried beside that mosque and beside that mosque is where he is buried. Today people come from far and wide to visit his grave and get the blessings of the spiritual atmosphere. His younger brother Ibrāhīm also found a high profile as a Shi'i scholar and was one of the associates of 'Uthmān ibn Sa'īd (d. 267/881) the first deputy of the twelfth Imam.

The report of Ibn Mahzīyār is in fact a double *naṣṣ* about al-Hādī (a) and his son Abū Muhammad al-Askari (a). He says to al-Hādī (a),

I asked your father about the Imam after him and he expressly mentioned your name (*naṣṣa 'alayk*), now in who will be the *imāmah* after you?" He said, "To my eldest son" and expressly mentioned Abū Muhammad (a).³⁵

Another account of *naṣṣ* comes from al-Ṣaqr ibn Abi Dulaf reported by al-Ṣadūq in *kamāl al-Dīn*.

I heard Abā Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali al-Riḍā (a) saying, "Indeed the Imam after me is my son Ali, his command is my command, his word is my word, and his obedience is my obedience."³⁶

We will revisit al-Ṣaqr later where I will talk about him and his much renowned father Abū Dulaf. His narration is a long one in which al-Hādī (a) does not only talk about the Imam after him but the Imams who would come after that. I will quote the continuation of the narration later.

³⁵ Husayn ibn Abd al-Wahhāb, *Uyūn al-Mu'jizāt*, P. 123. (Beirut: Mu'assatu Binti al-Rasūl, 2001)

³⁶ Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babuwayh al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah*, vol. 2, p. 378. (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1395)

Another account of *naṣṣ* is reported by al-Nu'mānī in his *Kitāb al-Ghaybah* through Umayyah ibn Ali al-Qaysi,

I said to Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali al-Riḍā (a) "Who is the successor after you?" He replied, "My son Ali, my son Ali."³⁷

As mentioned before, al-Mas'ūdi provides couple more instances of *naṣṣ* on al-Hādī (a). One account is from the renowned Muhammad ibn Ismā'il ibn Bazīgh, the scholar, the author and a vizier of the Abbasid court who used to conceal his faith and who was highly trusted by al-Riḍā (a). His position was like Muhammad ibn al-Faraj although he did not live long after al-Riḍā (a).

"Abū Ja'far [al-Jawād] (a) told me," says ibn Bazīgh, "This matter goes to Abu al-Hassan [al-Hādī (a)] when he will be only seven years old." Then he said, "Yes, [it is possible for] even less than seven years old as it was in Jesus (a)."³⁸

His other account is from a Mohammad ibn 'Uthmān al-Kūfi³⁹ and since he is an unknown personality I do not produce his account here.

Despite these accounts of *nass*, a few of al-Jawād's followers, however, supported the Imamate of his son Musa, but after a short time they rejoined the rest of the Shi'a in accepting the Imamate of Ali al-Hadi (a).⁴⁰

IV

Appointment by God

Al-Jawād (a) passed away in Baghdad while al-Hādī (a) was in Medina and hardly eight years old. There are reports that he immediately became aware of his father's demise despite the far distance. These reports, which are most probably bits and pieces of one

³⁷ Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nu'mānī, *Kitāb al-Ghāybah*, p. 191. (Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣadūq, 1397)

³⁸ *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, pp. 228-229.

³⁹ *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, p. 229.

⁴⁰ Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ash'ari al-Qummi, *al-Maqālāt wa al-Firaq*, p. 99. (Tehran: Dār al-kutub al-Islāmīyyah, 1963)

incident reported by different people from different angels, beside their intrinsic value, allude to an important concept; that is, apart from *naṣṣ* which is the appointment by the previous Imam, the Imam needs to receive a confirmation from God; an inspirational endorsement.

The beginning of this incident is reported by two sources; *Baṣā'r al-Darajāt* of al-Ṣaffār (d. 290/902) and *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah* of al-Maṣ'ūdi. Al-Ṣaffār reports the hadith directly from Muhammad ibn ʿĪsa while al-Maṣ'ūdi reports it from him through a book of al-Himyari.

The account is reported by a foster brother of al-Jawād (a); he says,

Abu al-Hassan [al-Hādī] (a) had a session with one of his teachers called Abū Zakarīyā. He was reading from a tablet, and as far as we knew Abū Ja'far [al-Jawād] (a) was in Baghdad. Suddenly he started to cry enormously. The teacher asked him of the reason but he did not answer him and instead requested his permission to go to the interior of the house. He gave him permission and as soon as he went inside, cries and lamentations were heard from the interior. After he came out we asked him about the reason for his crying; he said, "My father passed away this moment." We asked how he knew; he said, "A feeling of glory of Allah entered my heart that I had not experienced before, so I realized my father had passed away." Then the reporter goes on saying that they recorded the date and time as we will read in the following narration.⁴¹

In what seems to be the continuation of the same incident, the famous author al-Washshā'⁴² reports that,

Al-Hādī (a) ran to his father's aunt Umm Mūsa distraught; she asked him what had happened and he replied that his father had just passed away. She requested him not to speak such things but he insisted that the case was as he said.

Al-Washshā' goes on saying,

⁴¹ *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, p. 229.

⁴² His full name was Hassan ibn Ali al-Washsha'. Apparently, he was called *washshā'* because of was his profession which means embroiderer.

The day and the time of this news was written down and after a few days the news of the death of al-Jawād (a) reached Medina and it was exactly as he had said.⁴³

Al-Washshā' was a man of great scruple and caution with regards to such claims and generally any claim related to the position of the Imam; hence his report in this case is quiet significant. Al-Sadūq (d. 381/991) even reports that initially he was in doubt regarding the claims of al-Riḍā (a) on *Imāmah* and provides an interesting account about his investigation to remove his doubt. He recounts that al-Washshā' collected a great number of questions in a book to test with them al-Riḍā (a) and verify his truth.

"I went to his door and found it packed with people," says al-Washshā'. "I was trying in my mind to find a way to go inside and meet him in private to give him the book when a man came out with a book in his hand and shouted, 'Which one of you is al-Hassan ibn Ali al-Washshā' the nephew of Ilyās of Baghdad?' I stood up and said, 'I am al-Hassan, what do you want?' He replied, 'I have been told to give this book to you, take it.' I took the book and sat in a corner and read it; by God it contained the answers to each and every of my questions. Thereupon I was certain about al-Riḍā (a)."⁴⁴

At any rate, a similar testimony about al-Hādi (a) is reported by al-Saffār (d. 290/903) and Kulayni (d.329/941) from Hārūn ibn al-Faḍl, which seems to be expressing the time when al-Hādi went back to the exterior of the house.

I saw Aba al-Hassan Ali ibn Muhammad [al-Hādi (a)] on the day when Abū Ja'far [al-Jawād] (a) passed away saying, "*To God we belong and to Him we shall return*, Abū Ja'far passed away." He was asked, "How did you know?" He said, "A type of humility towards God entered me that I did not know it before."⁴⁵

The experience of humility that al-Hādi (a) mentions in this report is a consequence of the experience of the glory of God mentioned in the first hadith. They are in fact two

⁴³ 'Uyūn al-Mu'jizāt, p. 117; *Ithbāt al-Waṣṣiyah*, p. 230.

⁴⁴ Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babuwayh al-Sadūq, 'Uyūnu Akhbār al-Riḍā, vol. 1, p. 252. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'alami, 1984)

⁴⁵ Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Saffār, *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, p. 487. (Tehran, Munshūrāt A'alami, 1440); *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 381.

sides of the same coin. The sense of the glory of God humbles the heart and breaks through the soul. These may be accompaniments of the *inspiration* that comes to the Imam upon his appointment by God. Once al-Riḍā (a) was asked in this regard,

When would the Imam know that he is an Imam; is it as soon as the news of the demise of the incumbent Imam reaches him or on the moment of his demise? In your case, your father passed away in Baghdad while you were here. He replied, "On the moment of death." I asked how; he replied "God inspires him."⁴⁶

So it was in this way that al-Hādi (a) assumed his leadership as an Imam, an *inspiration* by God on the moment al-Jawād (a) passed away.

V

The Legacies and the Weapon

Al-Mas'ūdi reports that before leaving Medina, al-Jawād (a) had already submitted the *legacies* (*al-mīrāth*) and the *weapon* (*al-silāh*) to al-Hādi (a).⁴⁷ In Shi'a traditions one of the proofs of the Imam has always been that he should be in possession of the *legacies* and the *weapon*.

The *legacies* were the memorabilia from the previous prophets. Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (a) is reported to have said,

The tablets of Moses (a) are with us, and the staff of Moses is with us; we are the inheritors of the prophets.⁴⁸

The *mīrāth* also included other things, like Joseph's *shirt* and Solomon's *ring*.⁴⁹ It moreover included specific books of the *Ahl al-Bayt* including *Jafr* and *Jami'ah* and *Mushaf* of Fatimah. Abū Baṣīr reports from al-Ṣādiq (a) saying,

⁴⁶ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 381.

⁴⁷ *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, p. 227.

⁴⁸ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 231.

⁴⁹ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 232.

"O Abā Muhammad! Verily, the *jāmi'ah* (lit. the Collector of Everything) is in our possession, and how can they know what the *jāmi'ah* is?" I asked: "May I be made your ransom! What is the *jāmi'ah*?" He said: "It is a scroll (*Ṣaḥīfah*) whose length is seventy cubits according to [the measure of] the cubit of the Messenger of God (s); it is his dictation from his very mouth, and its writing is of Alī by his very hand. It includes the ruling for every permitted thing and forbidden thing, and everything that people need, even the mulct for scratching [someone]." ... Then he said: "And the *jafr* is in our possession; and what should teach them what the *jafr* is?" I said: "What is the *jafr*?" He said: "A container made of hide; in it is the knowledge of the Prophets and the Successors and the knowledge of all men of knowledge of *Banū Isrā'il* who have passed away." ... Then he said: "In our possession is the *muṣhaf* of Fāṭimah (a) and what should teach them what is the *muṣhaf* of Fāṭimah (a)." I said: "What is the *muṣhaf* of Fāṭimah (a)?" He said: "It is a *muṣhaf* (lit: a collection of written sheets bound within two boards) in which is the like of three times (the size) of the Qur'ān. By Allāh, there is not even one word of the Qur'ān in it."⁵⁰

In another narration al-Ṣādiq clarifies the confusion about the *jafr*.

By God, it is not as they say that there are two *jafrs* with something written on them. No, by God, they are two skins with the hair still on them which are crammed full, in one of them books, and in the other the armament of the Messenger of God.⁵¹

From the texts of different narrations in this regard it is understood that the *muṣhaf*, the *Jāmi'ah* and the books inside the *jafr* were the special assets of the Imams and that no other person was permitted to use them or even to see what was in them. The Imams let others know about their contents only indirectly. These books were passed down from each Imam to his successor.

The *weapon* was the armament of the Prophet (s) who was inherited by Ali (a) and the Imams after him. It was a sign and a proof of *Imāmah* with whomever it was placed. It is reported from al-Ṣādiq (a),

⁵⁰ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 239.

⁵¹ *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, p. 151.

Indeed, the likeness of the *weapon* among us is as the likeness of the Ark (*Tābūt*) among *Banū Isrā'īl*. At the threshold of whatever household of *Banū Isrā'īl* the Ark was placed, they were given the prophethood; and to whoever from among us passes the *weapon*, to him is given the *Imāmah*.⁵²

At any rate, by handing the *legacies* and the *weapon* to al-Hādi (a) before setting out for Baghdad, al-Jawād (a) had indirectly announced him as the next Imam.

VI

The Tough Beginning

After putting his mind in peace with regards to the imagined threat of al-Jawād (a), al-Mu'tasim decided to take charge of al-Hādi's course of life right from the beginning. Some scholars⁵³ believe that the caliph's decisions in this regard were instigated by his powerful and much influential advisor Ahmad ibn Abi Du'ād. Ibn Abi Du'ād was a charismatic Mu'tazili scholar who was appointed as chief justice (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) by the caliph and was instrumental in much of the sectarian strife of the time between the Hanbalites and the Mu'tazilites especially in the issue of the createdness of the Qur'an. He convinced the caliph not to repeat the mistake al-Ma'mūn made regarding al-Jawād (a) and to take action while al-Hādi (a) was still young.

In any case, al-Mu'tasim decided that the best course of action regarding al-Hādi (a) was to educate him according to the mainstream dogmas of the court and since he was still very young, he hoped that his personality could be moulded as desired. In this way he could both physically and mentally isolate him from his Shi'a. To accomplish this job, he appointed the aforementioned 'Umar ibn al-Faraj, who was, as I said before, the minister for the dirty jobs of the court. The account of this procedure is reported by al-Mas'udi from al-Himyari's book. The latter reports the incident with only one medium, Muhammad ibn sa'īd, which had the firsthand account. The report says,

After the demise of Abū Ja'far [al-Jawād (a)], 'Umar ibn al-Faraj entered Medina on his way to hajj. He summoned a group of people in Medina from among the opponents and enemies of the Family of the Messenger of God

⁵² *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 238.

⁵³ Al-Sheikh Ali al-Kūrāni, *Al-Imam al-Hādi*, p. 6. (Qum: 2013)

and told them, "Seek for me a man of literature and Qur'an and knowledge who is not friendly with this Family so that I can commit this boy to him and put him in charge of his education, and to order him to prevent the Rāfiḍites (lit. rejecters)⁵⁴ who seek him to get close to him. They named a man called Abū Abdillāh and known as al-Junaydi who excelled everyone else in Medina in literature and knowledge and whose intense rage and animosity [towards the *Ahl al-Bayt*] was famous.

'Umar ibn al-Faraj summoned him and allocated for him a salary from the royal purse and provided him with whatever he asked for. He informed him that the caliph himself had commanded him to choose someone like him to put in charge of that 'boy'.

Al-Junaydi took Abu al-Hassan [al-Hādi (a)] to the mansion in Ṣaryā and stayed there with him. He used to lock the doors at night and take the keys with him. This lasted for quite a while during which time the Shi'a were cut off from him and were deprived of hearing him and reading to him."⁵⁵

I mentioned before that Ṣaryā was an estate outside Medina belonging to al-Kādhim (a) in which al-Hādi (a) was born. To move al-Hādi (a) outside Medina was a clever measure by 'Umar ibn al-Faraj to isolate him not only from his followers but even from his family. It is not clear how long al-Junaydi kept al-Hādi (a) in Ṣaryā but it is understood from circumstantial evidence that he was kept there for a long time.

Muhammad ibn Sa'īd goes on reporting,

Then I met al-Junaydi in one Jum'ah; I greeted him and asked him, "How is the Hāshimite boy that you are educating?" He replied with rebuke, "You say this boy (*ghulām*)? Why don't you say this Hāshimite sheikh? By God! Do you know anyone more knowledgeable in Medina than me?" I said, "No." He said, "I swear by God, I put to him a chapter of literature which I think I have explored it to its end then he reads to me an aspect of it that adds to my

⁵⁴ A term used for the Shi'a by their opponents.

⁵⁵ *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, p. 230.

knowledge. People think that I teach him, but, I swear by God, I learn from him."⁵⁶

I passed by as if I had not heard what he said. Then I met him again after a while. I greeted him and asked him about his health and his situation. Then I said, "By the way, how is the young (*fatā*) Hāshimite?" He said, "Let you not say so! By God, he is the best of the inhabitants of the earth and above all that God has ever created. Many a time, when he wants to enter the room, I say to him, "You do not enter until you recite your allocated one tenth [from the Qur'an]." He says, "Which surah you want me to recite?" I mention one of the longest surahs that I have not taught him yet and he recites it in a way that I have not heard any recitation more correct and accurate than that, and in a voice nicer than the songs of Prophet David (a) which his singing has become a parable. Then he said, "His father died in Iraq while he was very young and he grew among those black girls, so where did he learn all these?"

Ibn Saʿīd continues,

He did not finish his days and nights before I met him again and found him believing in the *imāmah* of al-Hādi (a) and knowing the truth and acknowledging it.

This narration shows that al-Hādi (a) stayed in Ṣaryā for several years. In his first encounter with al-Junaydi, Muhammad ibn Saʿīd refers to him as a boy (*ghulām*) while in the second encounter he refers to him as the young man (*fatā*). The third encounter implies passage of long time during which al-Junaydi had completely changed. This explains why we do not have much information about al-Hādi (a) during those long years.

Two issues are worth exploring here. First, who was this al-Junaydi and what do we know about him; second, where does the Imam learn his knowledge from?

Muhammad ibn Saʿīd who reports this narration from al-Junaydi is a well-known figure; both Kulayni and al-Ṣadūq report from him and al-Najāshi mentions him among the ranks of the Shi'a authors. However, al-Junaydi may refer to several people. Ali al-

⁵⁶ *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, p. 231.

Kūrānī⁵⁷ concludes that he is the al-Junaydi who after acknowledging the position of al-Hādi (a) resided in Baghdad and is referred to by al-Sadūq in his book *kamāl al-Dīn* among those who visited Imam al-Mahdi and were not his deputies. Al-Sadūq writes,

Those individuals from Baghdad who were not his deputies [and saw him] were Abu al-Qāsim ibn Abī Hulays, Abū Abdillāh al-Kandi and Abū Abdillāh al-Junaydi and...⁵⁸

VII

Divine Knowledge

Regarding his knowledge, if you remember, al-Junaydi was surprised from the extent of the wisdom and learning of al-Hādi (a). He stated surprisingly that, "His father died in Iraq while he was very young and he grew up among those black girls, so where did he learn all these?"

This is a serious question; where does this knowledge come from? If it is not something taught by a teacher or learnt in school, how is it obtained? The answer to this question needs some elaboration.

The Qur'an speaks of some knowledge which comes from above rather than being learnt from below; knowledge which is taught by God not learnt by experience or through men. In surah *al-Kahf* a person is introduced who was given some knowledge directly by God; *They found one of Our servants, on whom We had bestowed Mercy from Ourselves and whom We had taught some knowledge from Our own* (18:65). We know that this type of knowledge can come to the Prophets regardless of their age, although its intensity may differ for different prophets. Moreover, some may receive it very early in their lives and some at later stages. In the case of Prophet John (a) God *gave him judgement while still a child* (19:12), and in the case of Jesus (a) while still in cradle (19:30).

But is this type of knowledge restricted to the Prophets only? I mean not the knowledge of prophethood, but the knowledge which comes from above in general. Apparently,

⁵⁷ *Al-Imam al-Hādi*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah*, p. 442.

there are other categories of people who may receive this type of knowledge; these are called *muhaddathun*. It is reported from the Prophet (s) that, "From my *Ahl al-Bayt* there will be twelve *muhaddath*."⁵⁹ This is a position that the Shi'a believe that their Imams have achieved by the grace of God.

Muhaddath is literally 'someone who is spoken to,' and technically it is someone who is spoken to by the angels. Kulayni has dedicated a chapter in *al-Kāfi* to clarify the meaning of *muhaddath* and its difference with a prophet and a Messenger.⁶⁰ According to these traditions a *muhaddath* is someone who can hear the voice of the angel without seeing it, unlike a messenger who hears the voice and sees the angel. This type of communication is sometimes described as 'inscription in the heart' (*naktun fi al-qalb*) or 'inspiration in the heart' (*qadhfun fi al-qalb*) or striking on the ears (*naqrūn fi al-asmā*).⁶¹

Knowledge of the Imam is a direct consequence of his position as a *muhaddath*. The following narration is a clear explanation of this fact.

Ḍurays al-Kanāsi says, Imam al-Šādiq said while Abū Bašīr was present,

Verily, David (a) inherited the knowledge of all the prophets, Solomon (a) inherited the knowledge of David (a), Muhammad (s) inherited from Solomon (a) and we inherited from Muhammad (s). With us are the *ṣuhuf* (written sheets) of Abraham and the Tablets of Moses. Abū Bašīr stated, "This is indeed great knowledge!" He said: 'O Abā Muhammad! This is not the knowledge. The real knowledge is that which comes (to us) night and day, day by day, hour by hour.'⁶²

The idea of people being communicated by the angels without having been appointed as prophets is invoked in the Quran in yet another outstanding figure; Mary mother of Jesus. Mary, we are told in the Quran, is a woman who is communicated by the angels at a very young age. "*And when the angels said, 'O Mary, verily God has chosen you and has purified you and has chosen you over all women of the world.'*" (3/41) Despite this explicit verse and other similar verses

⁵⁹ *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 72.

⁶⁰ *Al-Kāfi* vol. 1, pp. 176-177.

⁶¹ *Al-Kāfi* vol. 1, p. 263.

⁶² *Al-Kāfi* vol. 1, p. 225.

about Mary's communication, it is overwhelmingly held by Muslim theologians that she was not a prophetess. This necessitates the existence of an intermediate position between the rank of the prophets and the state of the normal people who are completely shut out of the realm of the angels. With regards to Mary, the Quran describes her as being a *Ṣeddīqah*, 'the most truthful'. *"The Messiah, son of Mary, is but an apostle. Certainly [other] apostles have passed before him, and his mother was a Ṣeddīqah, a truthful one."* (5: 75)

Ṣeddīqah is the feminine form for *Ṣeddīq* the plural of which is *Ṣeddīqīn*. This is a technical term used frequently in the Quran. We read in the Quran that some believers yearn to be guided to the path of some other believers, those referred to in the Opening chapter of the Quran as *an'amta 'alayhim* (whom you have favoured.) They are set as guides, signposts, and role models as the prayer in the Opening chapter testifies, *"Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom you have favoured"* (1: 6-7).

At the first glance, it is thought that those upon whom the favour of God is bestowed are the prophets who guide others without need to be guided by anyone else. However, chapter four of the Quran gives a wider meaning to this favoured group and extends it to some other ranks as well. *"Whoever obeys God and the Apostle they are with those whom God has favoured, including the prophets and the truthful ones, the witnesses and the righteous; and excellent companions are they."* (4: 69) According to this verse, four groups of believers are favoured by God, the prophets (*nabiyyīn*), the truthful (*Ṣiddiqīn*) the witnesses (*shuhadā*) and the most righteous (*Ṣāliḥīn*).

It is noteworthy that the believers are promised in this verse, provided they obey God and the Apostle, to be *with* and not *from* the favoured ones. These are the people who are drawn close to God (*muqarrabūn*).

One possible meaning of 'being close to God' is to increase knowledge about Him in the sense that some veils are removed from the heart allowing *muqarrabūn* to feel His presence and to see and hear what ordinary believers are usually deprived of. This in itself could be regarded as a big favour which is not easily extended to all believers. According to Imam Ali b. Abi Talib (a), although "such people are very few in number, but they are highly esteemed" by God. They come to an understanding of this world and a type of knowledge of its creator that is genuinely different from others. "They look at the inner side of this world while others look only at the outer side." "God whispers in their minds and speaks with them in

their very intellect and thus they kindle a light in others' hearts and ears and eyes."⁶³

An overview of Mary's life and times in the Quran and Islamic traditions indicate clearly that she was in constant contact with the higher realm and was in communication with the angels. This implies that of the four categories of those favoured by God, at least two, namely 'the prophets' and 'the truthful', are in some sort of contact with Him although the nature of that contact is different. Studying the lives of the prophets before they received revelation, one may come to the conclusion that it is only from one of the other three categories of 'the favoured ones' that God selects his apostles. That is why the prophets were in some sort of communication with God even before receiving the mission, as is testified by the stories of Joseph and Moses in the Quran.

It is in the category of *ṣuddīqūn* that the Shi'as place their Imams and establish the attributes of *muḥaddath* for them. As it is observed in the abovementioned verse of chapter four, this rank is a category placed immediately after the rank of the prophets, above the two other ranks, the Witnesses (*shuhadā'*) and the Righteous (*ṣāliḥūn*).

At any rate, this was the type of knowledge that made al-Hādi (a) to know about the demise of his father on the moment of his appointment as an Imam. Actually he became the heir to the knowledge of al-Jawād (a). In the language of the Imams such an heir is technically called a 'spiritual waṣī'.

VIII

Ban of Communications

Al-Hādi (a) was committed to the care of al-Junaydi probably in 221/837 and we assume that he was under his care until the demise of al-Mu'tasim in 227/843 when he was about 14 years old. There is not much information about the life of the Imam during this period. Naturally, after al-Junaydi acknowledged his wisdom and leadership his situation should have been eased and his communication with his followers should have been made easier, however, the evidence proves otherwise. There is no record that great

⁶³ Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nabī al-Balaghah*, sermon no. 222.

Shi'i scholars who passed away before 227/843 have reported anything from him. Some examples are as follows.⁶⁴

Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Naṣr al-Bazantī passed away in 221/836. He was one of the pillars of Shi'a scholarship and author of many books including *Kitāb al-Jāmi'* which was available in the libraries of Ṭūsi (d.460/1068) and al-Najāshi (d. 450/1059). He was a disciple of al-Kādhim (a), al-Riḍā (a) and al-Jawād (a) but have not reported anything from al-Hādī (a). More than seven hundred narrations in Shi'i compilations are from al-Bazantī. Al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli (d. 676/1277) regards him as one of the early jurists who was instrumental in the development of Shi'i jurisprudence.

The great author and traditionist al-Hasan ibn Ali ibn Faḍḍāl who died in 224/840 was another great scholar who have not reported anything from al-Hādī (a). He was not a man to be afraid of anyone; however, apparently meeting al-Hādī (a) was not possible during those years. Regarding his courage and frankness, Faḍl ibn Shādhān (d. 260/874), about whom we will talk later in details, reports that when he was a youth,

I went to learn from Ibn al-Faḍḍāl in Kūfa and he read for me the book of Ibn Bukayr and other books of narrations. Every day he used to carry his book coming to my lodge and reading it for me. However, when the son in law of Ṭāhir ibn al-Husain⁶⁵ was on his way for pilgrimage and everyone honoured him because of his power and wealth and his position with the sultan, al-Hasan did not go to visit him. Ṭāhir's son in law sent for him asking him to pay him a visit because it was not possible for him to go to al-Hasan. Our companions tried to persuade al-Hasan [to go] but he said, "What am I to do with Ṭāhir? I do not approach them; I have no business with them." Thereupon I realized that his visits to me were only due to his faith and devotion.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ I have chosen not to mention references in this section because they are based on induction from the books of Rijāl and mentioning all those references would be lengthening the footnotes with little use.

⁶⁵ Ṭāhir ibn al-Husain was the commander of al-Ma'mūn's army who defeated caliph al-Amīn and paved the way for al-Ma'mūn to become the caliph. He was arguably the most powerful man in the whole Islamic empire.

⁶⁶ Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad ibn Ali al-Najāshi, *Kitāb al-Rijāl*, p. 34 (Beirut: Mu'ssat al-A'alami, 2010)

This account indicates another fact about Ibn Faḍḍāl too; because he was so close to al-Riḍā (a), who was the heir apparent of caliph al-Ma'mūn, the politicians regarded him very highly and paid him great respect.

Al-Hasan ibn Mahbūb is another great jurist and a prolific writer who appears in the narration chains of more than 3000 traditions. He died in 224/840 a few months after Ibn Faḍḍāl. He reported from al-Kādhm (a), al-Riḍā (a) and al-Jawād (a) but not from al-Hādī (a) during the four years after the demise of al-Jawād (a).

All these indicate that it may not have been possible for Shi'a scholars to visit al-Hādī (a) during the years when he was under the care of al-Junaydi. However, it seems that after the demise of al-Mu'tasim and the accession of al-Wathīq to the throne the situation eased a bit.

The caliph al-Mu'tasim passed away in 227/843 having ruled for almost 10 years. It is reported that he said on his deathbed that, "Had I known that my life was so short I wouldn't have done what I did." He also recited the verse, "*When they rejoiced in what they were given, We seized them suddenly, whereat, behold, they were despondent.*" (6:44).⁶⁷ He died of 47 year of age.

After al-Mu'tasim his son, Hārūn al-Wāthiq was appointed to the throne and ruled for about five years until 332/848. He was then succeeded by his brother Ja'far al-Mutawakkil.

IX

Samarra

In the year 233/849 al-Mutawakkil decided to move al-Hādī (a) from Medina to Samarra. This was done in a very tactful way and with utmost apparent official respect.

As motioned before, al-Mu'tasim moved the capital from Baghdad to Samarra in 221/836. Al-Mu'tasim was born of a mother of Turkish origin from central Asia and apparently had great admiration for central Asian Turks. For this reason, he bought

⁶⁷ Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr al-Demeshghī, *al-Bidāyatu wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. 10, p. 325. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2010)

many Turkish slaves and recruited them in his army and even gave some of them very high offices.

These troops were called Turks, due to their origin, and *mamlūks* (slaves) due to their social status. According to al-Mas'udi he recruited 4000 of such troops and distinguished them from other soldiers by exuberant outfit. This was in addition to soldiers he had recruited from Egypt, Yemen and Khorāsān.⁶⁸

To keep such troops in Baghdad was cumbersome and the Iraqis became indignant of their rash and reckless behavior. The Turkish soldiers who were specially privileged had no regard for ordinary people and this led to sporadic skirmishes between the two and resulted in social discontentment. Thinking for a while to move his troops out of the capital, al-Mu'taṣim eventually decided to change his capital altogether. Exploring the shores of the Tigris River for a suitable place, he initially chose a village called Ghātūl on the shores of an offshoot of Tigris; he had his palace built there and the nobility started to build their houses round it and moved out of Baghdad. However, the place was not big enough to expand into a city and he had to abandon it and search again for another place.

Eventually, he chose the site of the ruins of the ancient city of *Sumere*, 125 kilometers north of Baghdad on the banks of Tigris. Apparently, the only building on the ruins of the city was a large Christian monastery which the caliph bought for 4000 dinars.⁶⁹

After the new capital was built it was so overwhelmed with troops that alongside its ancient Arabized name Samarra it was also called al-Askar (the military camp). Al-Mu'taṣim built extensive palace complexes in the area surrounded by garrison settlements for his guards. Eventually the capital was moved to the new city in 221/836. This was one year after the demise of al-Jawād (a) succession of al-Hādi (a).

The capital was built so beautifully that they made its name a compressed abbreviation for the phrase *Surra man ra'ā* (anyone who sees is rejoiced). It was further developed under Caliph al-Mutawakkil who sponsored the construction of lavish palace complexes such as al-Mutawakkiliyya, and the Great Mosque of Samarra with its famous spiral minaret or *Malwiya*, built in 232/847.

⁶⁸ *Murūj al-Dhahab*, p. 525.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

The city started to decline after the caliph al-Mu'taḍid decided to return the capital to Baghdad in 278/892; so it was the capital of the Abbasids only for 57 years. Notwithstanding, Samarra continued to survive until today, especially because of the shrines of the two infallible Imams al-Hādi (a) and al-Askari (a), which are visited by hundreds of thousands of Shi'a Muslims every year.

The decision to summon al-Hādi (a) to Samarra was made after the emir of Medina, Abdullah ibn Muhammad, warned al-Mutawakkil about the potential danger that the Imam would have posed against the establishment. In his much exaggerated letter he misinformed the caliph that al-Hādi (a) was accumulating arms in his house and was seeking an opportunity to rebel against the caliph.

As soon as the Imam became aware of the plot, he wrote a letter to al-Mutawakkil and informed him that the talebearing of the emir was absolutely unfounded and had no truth behind it. Al-Mutawakkil saw this as the best opportunity to put his mind at rest regarding Medina and al-Hādi (a) in the most respectful manner. Thus, he removed the emir of Medina from his post in solidarity with the Imam and at the same time summoned the Imam to Samarra. Al-Mufīd reports the letter written to al-Hādi by al-Mutawakkil. Despite its respectful tone, the letter, in effect, commands the Imam to be escorted to Samarra by Yahya ibn Harthamah.

The Commander of the faithful, being aware of your rank, caring for your close relationship (with him), judging matters which are appropriate for the circumstances of you and your House, confirms your dignity and their dignity. ... The Commander of the faithful has seen it as appropriate to dismiss 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad from his appointment over war and prayer in Medina, the city of the Apostle, may Allāh bless Him and His Family, because he was ignorant of your rights, as you have mentioned, and took no account of your rank when he suspected you and attributed to you a matter in which the Commander of the faithful knew of your innocence, and of the truthfulness of your intentions through your piety and your words. ...

However, the Commander of the faithful is anxious to be close to you and to see you. If you would come to visit him and reside with him as long as you want, then come, you and those whom you choose of your House, your retainers and your coterie, at your leisure and ease. You would travel when you wanted, stop when you wanted and go how you wanted. If you

liked Yahyā b. Harthama, the retainer of the Commander of the faithful, and the soldiers with him would travel with you and make the journey (with you).⁷⁰

Despite such a respectful letter, al-Mutawakkil did not receive al-Hādī (a) in Samarra respectfully and accommodated him in Khān al-Ṣa'ālik for a day, which was the most insulting act towards al-Hādī (a).⁷¹ Since the events in Samarra, their socio-political setting, and their implications for the Shi'a community need much detailed analysis, it needs a separate article. As al-Mufīd mentions,

The reports of him with al-Mutawakkil in which there are signs and indications of his Imamate are so numerous that it would make the book too long to mention them. If we attempted to present them, we would have to abandon the purpose we set for ourselves.⁷²

Thus, I shall end this article by a short discussion about the Inquisition (*miḥnah*) and the position of al-Hādī (a) towards the controversy.

X

The Inquisition (*al-Miḥnah*)

Miḥnah or *trial* refers to a period in which the Hanbalites were subject to inquisition regarding their belief in the eternity of the Quran. The aim of the inquisition was to enforce the officially sponsored doctrine that the *Quran* was the created word of God rather than uncreated or eternal.

The policy lasted for fifteen years from 218/833 to 234/848. It started in Rabi' al-Awwal of 218/833, four months before the caliph Ma'mūn's sudden death, and continued through the reigns of al-Mu'tasim and al-Wāthiq, and two years of al-Mutawakkil who reversed it in 234/848. As the whole inquisition period almost coincided with the leadership of Imam al-Hādī (a), it is worth to go into some details regarding this politico-religious controversy.

⁷⁰ *Kitāb al-Irshad*, (English translation), pp. 473-4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 374.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 375.

The trial was initiated by a series of letters from al-Ma'mūn to his governor of Baghdad, Ishaq ibn Ibrāhīm, to interrogate the judges and traditionists on the nature of the Quran. In his first letter he ordered the apprehension of only the high officials of Baghdad, but in later letters he demanded the interrogation of the lower hierarchies of *ulama* too.⁷³ Following his first letter he asked for seven prominent figures who had rejected the idea of the created nature of the Qur'an to be sent to him at Raqqah.⁷⁴ The group was comprised of the historian and traditionist Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *kātib* al-Wāqidi (d.230/845), Abū Muslim, the scribe of the famous commentator and traditionist Yazīd ibn Hārūn, the famous traditionist Yahyā ibn Ma'īn (d.233/847), the traditionist Abū Khaythamah Zuhayr ibn Harb (d. 234/848), Ismā'īl ibn Dawūd, Ismā'īl ibn Abi Mas'ūd, and traditionist Ahmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Dawraqi (d. 246/860).⁷⁵

The group were highly terrified by the edict and upon interrogation by al-Ma'mūn they all accepted out of *taqiyyah* (dissimulation) that the Qur'an did have created nature. Al-Dhahabi reports that Yahyā ibn Ma'īn and others explicitly mentioned that they accepted the idea under the sword.⁷⁶

Al-Ma'mūn dispatched all the seven to Baghdad and Ishaq ibn Ibrāhīm gathered them together once more to announce publicly what they had confessed before al-Ma'mūn. They all testified before a large crowd of jurists and traditionists that the Quran was created. Those present too affirmed exactly what the seven had replied to al-Ma'mūn, so Ishaq let them go.⁷⁷

Following this testimony and another letter from al-Ma'mūn, Ishaq ibn Ibrāhīm summoned to his court a large number of other jurists, judges and traditionists including Ahmad ibn Hanbal who was not yet as prominent as those previously summoned. He asked them to testify that the Quran was created and was not the eternal word of God. They all tried to evade the question and gave equivocal answers. The report of this

⁷³ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Tabari*, vol. 32, p. 205. (New York: State University of New York Press. 1987)

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 199.

⁷⁵ *The History of Tabari*, vol. 32, pp. 204-205.

⁷⁶ Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Dhahabi, *Tārīkh al-Islam*, vol. 15, p. 21. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Arabi, 1409)

⁷⁷ *The History of Tabari*, vol. 32, p. 205.

meeting enraged al-Ma'mūn who expected a clear-cut answer and as a consequence summon them all to his court.

This latter letter of al-Ma'mūn was highly threatening and as a result all the judges and scholars testified to what al-Ma'mūn had asked for out of fear of execution except four people, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Muhammad ibn Nūh, Sajjādah and al-Qawāirī. They were put in iron fetters to be sent to the caliph, however, Ishāq delayed their dispatch in the hope that they may change their minds. The delay worked for Sajjādah and al-Qawāirī who gave their acknowledgements one after another and proclaimed that the Quran was indeed created, but Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ibn Nūh persisted in their original confession and would not recant. Consequently, they were sent to Tarsus loaded with shackles to be tried by the caliph.⁷⁸

In the meantime, Ishāq wrote a separate letter explaining what the group had finally assented to but did not allow them to leave Baghdad waiting to receive orders from the caliph. Apparently, the scholars had divulged to their followers that they had confessed in *taqiyyah* and hence there is no harm on them; something that did not escape the attention of the caliph's secret agents. The reply to Ishāq's letter which arrived after several days was shocking though interesting.

The Commander of the Faithful has understood what the group assented to. The postmaster and intelligence agent [*sāhib al-khabar*] Sulaymān ibn Ya'qūb has reported that Bishr ibn al-Walid has furnished an interpretation of the verse which God, Most High, revealed in connection with 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, " . . . *except him who is compelled, while his heart is still at peace in belief*"⁷⁹, but his interpretation is erroneous; God merely refers in this verse to the person who holds fast [in his heart] to the faith, while outwardly professing polytheism. As for the person who holds fast [in his heart] to polytheism, while outwardly showing the faith, the verse does not refer to him at all. Hence, send them all to Tarsus, where they are to wait until the time when the Commander of the Faithful will leave the Byzantine lands.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, vol. 32, p. 221.

⁷⁹ *The Quran*, 16:106

⁸⁰ *The History of Tabari*, vol. 32, p. 221.

Following this letter, Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm sent all the notables to al-Ma'mūn but when they approached Raqqah, the news of al-Ma'mūn's death reached them, and the governor of Raqqah, sent them back to Baghdad where they were set free.

Letters were also sent to governors of the provinces with the same effect and the inquisition became a universal practice.⁸¹ The policy continued after al-Ma'mūn by al-Mu'taṣim and his son al-Wāthiq. Al-Mu'taṣim severely enforced the policy and imprisoned Ahmad ibn Hanbal and lashed him heavily.

The events turned two years into the reign of al-Mutawakil and the victims of the persecution were reversed.

The Causes of the Inquisition

Examining the writings of al-Ma'mūn makes it obvious that he was under the influence of the Mu'tazilite thought about *tawhīd* and the attributes of God. He maintained particularly close ties with great Mu'tazilite figures like Abu al-Hudayl al-'Allāf (d. cir 230/845), al-Nazzām (d.231/846) and Thumāmat Ibn al-Ashras (d. 225/840).

Abu al-Hudhayl, arguably one of the greatest figures of Mu'tazili thought, frequented the Abbasid court since the time of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 188/809), however, the visits took place on the invitation of the influential and well educated Persian ministers of Āl-e Barmak. His direct relations with the caliphs started at the time of al-Ma'mūn. On his return to Baghdad from Marv in 203/819, al-Ma'mūn invited him to the court and honoured him. It is reported that Abu al-Hudhayl told al-Ma'mūn that he had not accepted his invitation for money but to correct his beliefs. Notwithstanding, al-Ma'mūn ordered an annual stipend of sixty thousand dirhams to be given to him to spend on his students.⁸²

Throughout the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn, Abu al-Hudhayl had debates with prominent scholars of Islam and other religions in the presence of the caliph himself.⁸³ According to Maltā, al-Ma'mūn, al-Mu'tasim and al-Wāthiq used to invite him to the court for sessions of debate and gave him preference over all others. The caliph al-Ma'mūn had composed a line of poem in his praise in which he had commended his command in

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 32, p. 222.

⁸² *Dā'rat al-Ma'ārif-e bozorg-e Islāmi*, vol. 1, p. 390. (Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia)

⁸³ *Ibid.* pp. 390-391.

kalām. Although the claim of Qādi Abd al-Jabbār that 3000 people converted to Islam as a result of his debates may be an exaggeration, but it can indicate his ability to subdue his opponents in argument.⁸⁴

Both Abu al-Hudhayl and al-Nazzām were aware of Greek philosophy, something which made them more attractive to the caliph al-Ma'mūn. The caliph was fond of philosophy and had sent a delegation to Roman territories to procure Greek books of philosophy; he institutionalized what was informally founded by his father under the name The House of Wisdom, *Bayt al-Hikmah* and gave it the task of translating Persian and Greek books into Arabic.⁸⁵

However, more influential than the two abovementioned scholars, was the prominent Thumāmat ibn al-Ashras (d.225/840) who had a lofty position in al-Ma'mūn's court and accounts of his debates in the presence of the caliph are well recorded. After the murder of Faḍl ibn Sahl (d.203/818) al-Ma'mūn offered him the position of the chief minister, but he refused and requested to be permitted to remain a scholar. Instead he introduced to the caliph Ahmad ibn Abi Khālid.⁸⁶

With such an attitude of caliph al-Ma'mūn and his excitement about philosophical and rational arguments, it was but natural that he would find it hard to tolerate the literalist views of the traditionists of his time. It was just like two different worlds and two different Islams.

Western scholars of Islamic history like Amin, Hitti, Kennedy, and W.M. Watt have agreed that al-Ma'mūn was acting under the influence of Mu'tezilite thought.⁸⁷ The denial of the eternal nature of the Quran was one of the most central themes of Mu'tazilite doctrine. The idea of the created Qur'an developed directly from the Mu'tazilite definition of the fundamental principle of *tawhid* which is inherent within their "five fundamental principles".

However, notwithstanding al-Ma'mūn's fascination with the Mu'tazili thought, it is difficult to analyze why he should have focused on the issue of the createdness of the

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 389.

⁸⁵ Muhammad ibn Ishāq al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 304. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1997)

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 207.

⁸⁷ Nawas, J. A. (1994). A reexamination of three current explanations for Al-Mamun's introduction of the Mihna. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26 (4), 615-629. P. 616.

Qur'an and why he resorted to coercion. There should be have been something in the contextual frame of the time which is probably lost to us.

Some historians⁸⁸ have disagreed with the idea of direct Mu'tazilite involvement in the inquisition. Instead, they mention the Hanafi School as a conspiratorial participant within the *miḥna*. Their reason is that Hanifis also believed in the createdness of the Qur'an. However, this is explicitly in conflict with what Abu Hanīfa writes in his *Fiqh al-Akbar*:

The Qur'an is the Word of God Almighty, written on collections of leaves (*masāḥif*), preserved in men's hearts, recited on men's tongues, and sent down to the Prophet, upon whom be God's peace and blessing. Our uttering of the Qur'an is created, and our recitation of the Qur'an is created, but the Qur'an itself is uncreated.⁸⁹

Thus, the views of Abū Hanīfah may have been misinterpreted by these scholars, although it is not as extreme as what literalists like Ahmad ibn Hanbal believed about the eternity of the Quran as it will be explained later.

However, what can link both Hanafi and Mu'tazili involvement in the *miḥna* is an individual who is regarded by many to be the main architect of the inquisition.⁹⁰ He is no one but Ahmad ibn Abi Du'ād (d. 240/855), the chief justice and the closest advisor of the three consecutive caliphs al-Ma'mūn, al-Mu'taṣim and al-Wāthiq. He was Hanafi in *fiqh* and Mu'tazili in *kalām*. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadi expressly identifies him to be the one who instigated al-Ma'mūn to embark on inquisition about the created nature of the Quran, and al-Dārquṭni mentions that he was the one who tried the scholars of his time.⁹¹ According to Ibn al-Nadīm he was the most prominent among the Mu'tazilites and no one in his caliber could be found nobler than him.⁹² Al-Mu'taṣim, especially, did not decide on any matter without his consultation.⁹³

⁸⁸ Melchert, C. (1997). *The adversaries of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*. *Arabica*, 44 (2), 234-253.

⁸⁹ Imam Abū Hanīfah, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, p. 301. (UAI: Maktabat al-Furqān, 1999)

⁹⁰ Al-Sheikh al-Taḥī al-'Uzzī, *Al-Ṭabaḡhāt al-Sanīyyah fī Tarājīm al-Ḥanafīyyah*, vol. 1, p. 171. (Cairo: 1970)

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 334.

⁹² *Al-Fihrist*, p. 212.

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 334.

The caliph al-Mu'taṣim did not have the knowledge of his brother al-Ma'mūn and was not much geared into theological debates such as the creation or eternity of the Qur'an, however, al-Ghuzzi reports from historians including al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadi and al-Subuki that it was Ahmad ibn Abi Du'ād who encouraged him to continue with the inquisition.⁹⁴ According to Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. 335/946) Ahmad ibn Abi Dau'ād devoted himself to inquisition over the creation of the Quran and exaggerated in that with absolute obstinacy and instigated the caliphs to do the same.⁹⁵

However, the question still remains as why Ahmad ibn Abi Du'ād should have wanted to assume such a hard line position against the literalists and instigate the caliph against them. The dispute over creation or eternity of the Quran was not a new thing. It was an ongoing dispute for about a century since the time of Ja'd ibn Dirham (d. 105/724) and his student Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/746). The latter is quite well known for his anti-literalist views and argued for the creation of the Quran and defended it with strong logic. His name resonated throughout the second and the third centuries, since the traditionists pejoratively dubbed all the Mu'tazilis as Jahmīyyah after his name. So the dispute was not new, but the question is what could have driven al-Ma'mūn or his chief justice to create a public discontentment about the whole issue now?

Some western scholars have suggested an extremely strange answer to this question. The origin of this answer goes back to the renowned W. M. Watt; according to him the dispute was linked with a power struggle between what may be called the 'autocratic' (civil servants) bloc and the 'constitutionalist' (scholars) bloc.

Based on this opinion, the ruler's power would be all the greater if it was also agreed that the Quran was created, since what was created by God was dependent only on his will, and he could presumably have willed to create it otherwise. On the other hand, if the Quran was the uncreated speech of God and (as they also maintained) an eternal attribute of his being, it could not be changed and could not be set aside even by the ruler of the Muslims. It followed that the affairs of the Islamic empire must be ordered strictly in accordance with the provisions of this eternal speech of God. Since the accredited interpreters of this eternal speech were the *ulama*, it further followed that

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 350-351.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 335.

acceptance of uncreatedness of the Quran enhanced the power of the *ulama* at the expense of that of the civil servants.⁹⁶

The simplest thing I can say about this analysis is that I cannot understand it. All Muslims, those who believe in the eternality of the Quran and those who believe in its creation, agree that it is the word of God and cannot be changed and should not be interpreted based on unwarranted opinions. It is like saying that since the appointment of Muhammad (s) as a prophet by God happened in time and was not eternal then he could be set aside by the ruler of the Muslims and he could decide to introduce someone else as the Prophet. Moreover, if the so called civil servants bloc could so successfully defeat the constitutionalist bloc why al-Mutawakkil should reverse it?

The best answer that we can find for this question is to say that the trouble did not start from the court but was ignited by the literalists. The literalists were taking an increasingly aggressive stance against anyone who believed in the creation of the Quran. The sad story of Ja'd ibn Dirham (d. 105/724) and his slaughter on the Eid al-Adhā by the ruler of Kufa as a sacrifice to please God is well known. Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/746) was also executed for his belief in the creation of the Quran and people were declared as apostates and disbelievers if they did not believe in its eternality. This practice of *takfīr* and punishment was in place by the literalists even before the controversy over the Quran. Ma'bad al-Juhani (d.80/699) was executed by the literalists for his belief in human free will. The literalist jurist al-Awzā'i (d. 157/773) had Ghaylān al-Dimishqi (d. 125/743) executed after his hands and feet were cut off and his tongue was plucked out because of the same belief.

Such aggressive attitude had continued for more than a century, however, the court or the chief justice became sensitive when the latter himself was accused of disbelief. As a matter of fact, al-Ma'mūn started to talk about the creation of the Quran in 212/827 but he embarked on inquisition in 218/833 after Ibn Abi Du'ād had joined the court.⁹⁷ The literalists did not dare to accuse the caliph of disbelief but they could and did talk extensively about the chief justice; something that indirectly accused the caliph of *kufīr* too.

⁹⁶ W. M. Watt, *Introduction to the Quran*, pp. 170-172 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995)

⁹⁷ *Al-Ṭabaḡhāt al-Sanīyyah fī Tarājīm al-Ḥanafīyyah*, vol. 1, p. 348.

Al-Khaṭīb reports from 'Awn al-Kindī that there was a time that if anyone ever said in Karkh district of Baghdad that Ibn Abi Du'ād was a Muslim he would have been killed; this was prior to the huge fire of Karkh which happened during the time of al-Mu'taṣim.⁹⁸ Al-Ghuẓẓi reports from Hasan ibn Thawāb that he asked Ahmad ibn Hanbal about those who believe in creation of the Quran and he replied that they are out of faith (*kāfir*). He then asked about Ahmad ibn Abi Du'ād and Ibn Hanbal replied that he disbelieves in the Great God (*kāfirun billāh al-'adhīm*).⁹⁹ The way this conversation is reported indicates that it was before the inquisition.

As said before, the literalists had no reservation to condemn people to death over their belief in creation of the Quran. Imam Mālik (d. 179 A.H.) was asked concerning one who says that the Quran is created, what should be done to him: He replied, "He should be forced to repent, and if he refuses, then his head should be cut off."¹⁰⁰ It is reported from Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal that he said,

The *Jahmiyyah* are of three types: One group of them says that the Quran is created; another says that it is the speech of God and stops at that; and the third say, Our recitation of the Quran is created. For me, these three groups have the same status.

And in another narration, he adds,

And all of them are of the *Jahmiyyah*, disbelievers. They should be forced to repent, and if they do not do so, then they should be killed!¹⁰¹

So, I believe that what happened at the time of al-Ma'mūn was the reaction of a Mu'tazili court towards the strict intolerance of the literalist scholars.

The Stance of Imam al-Hādī (a)

The Stance of Imam al-Hādī (a) towards this controversy was non-engagement. The Shi'a view regarding the created nature of the Quran was very clear. It is reported from Imam Ali that he said,

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 336

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 351.

¹⁰⁰ Abū Ammār Yāsir Qāzi, *Introduction to the Sciences of the Quran*, p. 36. (Birmingham: Al-Hidāyah Publishing and Distribution, 1999)

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 39.

His Word, Immaculate is He, is an act created and formed by Him. It did not exist before that, and if it was eternal it would have been a second God.¹⁰²

To expound this view Shi'a theologians, like many others, have divided the attributes of God into attributes of His essence (*Sifāt al-dhāt*) and attributes of His act (*Sifāt al-fi'ī*). The attributes of essence are eternal but they are the same as His essence not anything outside it. In fact, they are the very essence seen from a certain perspective. In other words, they are identical with the essence, like knowledge, power and life. The attributes of act are inferred from the acts of God in the time-bound creation and could not be known before His act; hence, they cannot be eternal. The whole question is whether Speech of God is an attribute of His essence or an attribute of His act.

Rationally one can assume that the *ability to speak* or more generally to communicate could be traced back to Power which is an attribute of essence. However, the very *act of speaking* in itself is an act which needs two sides and therefore is an attribute of act. All attributes of act like mercy, care, generosity, rewarding, punishing, etc. could be analysed in this way. Apparently, the literalists did not differentiate between the *ability to speak* and the *act of speaking*. The attributes of act are in effect the creations of God rather than His attributes. This is clearly explained in a letter written by Imam al-Šādiq (a) to Abd al-Rahīm al-Qaṣīr. He says, I wrote to Imam al-Šādiq through 'Abd al-Malik abn A'yan,

The people are in disagreement about the Quran; some believe that it is the Word of God and is not created (*ghayru makhḷūq*); some others say it is the Word of God and it is created (*makhḷūq*).

The Imam wrote back,

The Quran is the Word of God; it is originated (*muhdath*) but is not created (*ghayru makhḷūq*). It is not eternal [from the beginning] with the eternality of God, far glorified is He of that. There was God and there was nothing other than Him, known or unknown. He existed while he was not speaking, willing, moving or acting. All these attributes are originated simultaneous with His act.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 186.

¹⁰³ Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babuwayh al-Šadūq, *al-Tawhīd*, p. 158. (Qum: Nashr-e Islami, 1398)

The explanation offered by Imam al-Šādiq (a) may seem confusing as he says that it is originated but not created. However, it explains the root of the matter. As a matter of fact, this whole dispute was a linguistic misperception which was confused with theology. It goes back to a narration reportedly from the Prophet (s), who said,

The Quran is the Word of God not created (*ghayru makhlūq*) and whoever says that it is created (*makhlūq*) has disbelieved (*kafara*) in the Great God.¹⁰⁴

In the commentary to the previous narration from Imam al-Šādiq (a), Sheikh al-Šadūq observes that the meaning of not created (*ghayru makhlūq*) is that it is not made up or fabricated (*ghayru makdhūb*) not that it is not originated in time. The Imam explains clearly that not created doesn't mean not originated in time, and he emphasizes that it is not eternal [from the beginning] with the eternality of God. Al-Šadūq cites verses of the Quran like 29:17 and 38:1 in which *makhlūq* is used to mean made up and fabricated.¹⁰⁵ Al-Sheikh al-Mufīd makes similar remarks, saying that many reports have reached us from the Imams forbidding us to say that the Quran is '*makhlūq*' (created). He says that he does not allow this term to be used for the Quran because in literature it means 'deniable' or 'made up' however, permission is given to use other unequivocal terms like *Muhdath* signifying that it is not eternal.¹⁰⁶

It is interesting to know that despite the well-known Shi'a view about the created nature of the Quran the Shi'a Imams usually took a neutral stance all through the dispute and did not allow their followers to engage in the argument. It seems that they saw the whole dispute futile resulted from a linguistic confusion and misunderstanding.

That is why apart from the above narration from Imam al-Šādiq (a) which appears in a private letter, the Imams usually avoided making public comments about it. Rayyān ibn Ṣalt reports that he asked al-Riḍā (a) about his view regarding the Quran; the Imam replied, "It is the Word of God and do not go beyond that."¹⁰⁷ In reply to the same question to Fuḍayl ibn Yasār he just said, "It is the Word of

¹⁰⁴ Al-Sayyid Moḥsin al-Amīn, *A'yān al-Shi'a*, vol. 1, p. 108 (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf, 1403)

¹⁰⁵ *Al-Tawhid*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁶ Abū Abdillāh al-Mufīd, *Awā'il al-Maqālāt*, p. 153. (Beirut: Dār al-Mufīd, 1993).

¹⁰⁷ Muḥammad ibn Ali ibn Babuwayh al-Šadūq, *al-Amāli*, p. 639. (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Bi'thah, 1417)

God." Imam al-Kādhim (a) was asked, "What do you say about the Quran? People in our area have disagreed about it; a group say that it is created and another group say that it is uncreated." He replied, "I do not say any of those; I only say that it is the word of God."¹⁰⁸

We know that almost the whole duration of the inquisition coincided with the leadership of Imam al-Hādi (a) and it was natural that he would have been asked about it repeatedly, but he followed the same policy of none-engagement. Al-Yaqtīni informs us of a letter written by Imam al-Hādi to one of his followers in Baghdad with the following content,

May God protect us and you from the trials ... We think that the dispute over the Quran is an innovation in which the one who asks and the one who replies both have a share. The one who questions seeks something which is not his concern and the one who answers implicates himself in something which is not his task. There is no creator but God and everything beside Him is created (*makhliūq*); and the Quran is the Word of God; do not put any other name on it from yourself because you go astray.¹⁰⁹

Al-Yaqtīni mentions that this letter was written to one of the Imam's followers in Baghdad, however, further investigation reveals that this letter was actually written to the chief justice, Ahmad ibn Abi Du'ād, in reply to his request from the Imam to acknowledge the created nature of the Quran.

Al-Khaṭīb reports from Ahmad ibn Mu'addil that Ibn Abi Du'ād wrote to "a man in Medina" that, "If you pledge allegiance to the Commander of the Faithful (meaning the caliph) in his view [regarding the Quran], you will deserve his reward, and if you refrain you are not safe from his reprimand." Then he produces as the reply the same narration as above. Al-Khaṭīb mentions that Ahmad ibn Mu'addil 'imagined' that Ibn Abi Du'ād's letter was addressed to Abdullah ibn Mūsa ibn Ja'far, indicating that he did not believe he was the addressee. Moreover, he adds that after receiving the reply, Ibn Abi Du'ād ignored it and did not mention it to the caliph.¹¹⁰ The only person in Medina that could refuse the request of Ibn Abi Du'ād and remain unscathed was no one but Imam al-Hādi

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 647.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 639.

¹¹⁰ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdadi, *Tārīkhu Baghdad*, vol. 4, p. 373. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 1997)

(a). Al-Ghuzzi reports account of the same letter from Ibn Mu'addil without making any mention of the addressee just saying "to a man in Medina."¹¹¹ The same anonymity of the addressee is found in al-Dhahabi; however, he makes a very strange addition which although goes with his ideology but renders the whole narration contradictory. In the sentence, *there is no creator but God and everything beside Him is created (makhlūq)* he adds *except the Quran*.¹¹²

It is worth noting that although the Shi'as believed in the creation of the Quran and were famous for that, Imam al-Hādi (a) did not approve of the inquisition and did not play in the hand of Ahmad ibn Abi Du'ād. Neither the previous Imams, who lived at the time of the literalists supremacy, allowed their followers to engage in the futile argument which was a mere linguistic confusion.

¹¹¹ *Al-Ṭabaḡhāt al-Sanīyyah fī Tarājīm al-Ḥanafīyyah*, vol. 1, p. 339.

¹¹² *Tārīkh al-Islam*, vol. 17, p. 43.

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