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Remembering the infallible imams: narrative and memory in medieval Twelver Shi'ism

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

REMEMBERING THE INFALLIBLE IMAMS:
NARRATIVE AND MEMORY IN MEDIEVAL TWELVER SHIʿISM

by

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B.A., Bryan College, 2000

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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Acknowledgments

Like others who have taken this path, I have depended immensely on teachers, colleagues, and friends. But my reliance upon my family stands out as that indispensable ingredient without which my present accomplishments would not have been possible. My mother's long years of support throughout my life are especially due public acknowledgment. Over the last eight years my two daughters have provided me with new meaning, and they inspire me to live more fully every day. But for over a decade now, the love and friendship of my wife, Laurie, has been of incomparable importance. She has continually helped make me a better person, a more careful scholar, and frankly, happier. Thank you, Laurie.

A list of names of those who have contributed to this project in some way would be very long. Passing conversations and encounters that took place long before this research began proved to be influential factors. But there is a shorter list of people that I want to mention who have directly and significantly helped me get to this point. Foremost among them is my advisor and mentor, Kecia Ali. She has consistently held me to high academic standards, as any good advisor ought. But she also provided the support and encouragement that every advisee needs. I could not be more grateful for the unforeseen chain of events which enabled me to study under her guidance.

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REMEMBERING THE INFALLIBLE IMAMS:
NARRATIVE AND MEMORY IN MEDIEVAL TWELVERS SHIᶜISM

(Order No.)

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ABSTRACT

As the Twelver Shiᶜa coalesced into an increasingly distinct community between the 10th and 12th centuries CE, a new type of religious literature emerged. Writers began to collect narratives of the lives and deaths of the twelve infallible imams into single works. This study analyzes these early works, which have served as a template for similar Shiʻi compilations written in the centuries since. The goal of this analysis is to shed light on how the historical narratives of a given community emerge in relationship to the ways in which that community construes religious meaning. I focus on five formative Arabic works from this period: [1] *Ithbāt al-waṣīya* attributed to al-Masᶜūdī (d. 345/956); [2] *Kitāb al-irshād* by al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022); [3] *Dalā'il al-imāma* attributed to Ibn Jarīr (d. early 5th/11th c.); [4] *Iᶜlām al-warā'* by al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154); and [5] *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib* by Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192).

As the first study to isolate and analyze collective biographies of the imams, this dissertation discusses unique structural and thematic patterns in these early works that were related to the concerns of the writers' community—patterns that helped produce generic expectations that remain in place to the present day. Grouping these texts into one genre allows us to better discern the religious vision upheld by this literature. My analysis begins with birth narratives, showing how these symbolic and fantastic stories highlight concrete and practical concerns of the writers. Second, I explore the importance of the imams' bodies, which function as sites of both intense devotion and great anxiety. The final two chapters explain the many and varied forms of betrayal suffered by the imams in relationship to the pervasive social grievances that are a subtext to the biographies. The memory of the imams cultivated in this literature and the emotional sensibilities projected through it provide insight into how systems of meaning are constructed. The Shiᶜi community used this literature to stake religious claims on the cosmic meaning and the eternal relevance of all aspects of the imams' lives, claims that made remembering their stories of critical importance.

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Primary Sources:

Dalāʾil = Ibn Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad (attributed). *Dalāʾil al-imāma.* Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt, 1408/1988.

Iʿlām = al-Ṭabrisī, Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan. *Iʿlām al-wará b-aʿlām al-hudá*. Edited by ʿAlī Akhbār al-Ghaffārī. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt, 1464/2004.

Al-Irshād = al-Mufīd, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmanī. *Kitāb al-irshād: fī maʿrifat ḥujaj Allāh ʿalá al-ʿibād.* 2 volumes. Beirut: Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, 1429/2008. English translation: *Kitāb al-Irshād: The Book of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams.* Translated by I. K. A. Howard. London: Muhammadi Trust, 1981.

Ithbāt = al-Masʿūdī, ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn (attributed). *Ithbāt al-waṣīyah lil-Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.* Qum: Ansarian, 1384/2005.

Manāqib = Ibn Shahrashūb, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī. *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib.* 5 volumes. Edited by Yūsuf al-Biqāʿī. [Qum:] Dhawī al-Qurbá, 1421 [2000].

Secondary Sources:

CHALAP = *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Religion, Learning and Science in the ʻAbbasid Period*. Edited by M. J. L Young, J. D. Latham and R. B. Serjeant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

CHALUP = *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period.* Edited by A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant, and G. R. Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

CHIr = *Cambridge History of Iran.* 7 volumes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968-1990.

DMBI = *Dāʾirat al-maʿārif-i buzurg-i Islāmī.* Edited by Kāẓim Mūsavī Bujnūrdī. Tehran: Markaz-i Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī, 1368- [1989-]. Some entries have been translated: *Encyclopaedia Islamica.* Edited by Wilferd Madelung, Farhad Daftary. London: Brill, with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008-.

EAL = *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature.* 2 volumes. Edited by Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey. London: Routledge, 1998.

EI^1 = *The Encyclopedia of Islam,* first edition. Edited by M. Th.Houtsma, T.W.Arnold, R.Basset and R.Hartmann. Leiden: Brill, 1913-1936.

EI^2 = *The Encyclopedia of Islam,* second edition. Edited by P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Leiden: Brill, 1960-.

EI^3= *The Encyclopedia of Islam,* third edition. Edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer; Denis Matringe; John Nawas; Everett Rowson. Leiden: Brill, 2007-.

EIr = *Encyclopædia Iranica.* Edited by Ehsan Yarshater. London: Routledge, 1983-.

ER2 = *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd edition. Edited by Lindsay Jones. Detroit: MacMillan Reference USA, 2005.

GAL = Brocklemann, Carl. *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur, Zweite den Supplementbänden angepasste Auflage.* Leiden, Brill, 1943-1949.

GAS = Sezgin, Fuat. *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums.* Leiden: Brill, 1967-2007.

IJMES = *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*

IQ = *Islamic Quarterly*

JAOS = *Journal of the American Oriental Society*

JSAI = *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*

Dates and Transliterations

I have attempted to follow the custom of providing death dates in both the Islamic (*hijrī*) calendar and the Gregorian. In the text, however, all dates refer to the Common Era, unless otherwise noted. The exception to this is the year of publication in many non-English publications where I have provided the date printed in the source (usually *hijrī,* though a few books printed in Iran are from the Iranian lunar Islamic calendar).

Unless noted otherwise, all translations are mine. For transliteration of Arabic (or Persian) names and terms, I have followed the system used by the Library of Congress, with the exception of the *tāʾ marbūta* which I only render into English if it is in the construct state (where it is a "t"). Any foreign terms which have become common in English (such as "hadith") or words that I use extensively throughout this dissertation (namely, "Shiʿa" and "imam") have remained without diacritical marks. For consistency, however, all Arabic proper names have been provided with diacritics except for contemporary authors who have a known English spelling preference.

Introduction

> "Communities, in the sense in which we are using the term, have a history—in an important sense are constituted by their past—and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a 'community of memory,' one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of community."[1]

In 2003, I moved to the shrine city of Qom, Iran, whose seminaries are rivaled only by those of Najaf as centers of Shiʿi learning.[2] One of the most striking aspects of popular religious life I encountered while studying in Iran was the sincere love expressed by so many acquaintances for the twelve Shiʿi imams—the pure and infallible figures who inherited the authoritative knowledge and wisdom of the Prophet Muḥammad after his death in 632. I heard countless stories about these imams from my teachers, friends, and neighbors. They were stories about the imams' miracles and the remarkable achievements of their lives, as well as tales of the suffering and oppression they endured. The events related were often set in the distant past, drawn from myriad books about the imams' lives, or recalled from preachers' sermons. But many of the stories revealed imams who also inhabited the present—imams who respond to believers' prayers and engage them in their day to day affairs. I heard of blessings received or miracles experienced during *ziyāra* (shrine visitations), and I listened to people relate how they had encountered the imams in their dreams.

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[1] Robert Bellah, R. Madsen, W. Sullivan, A. Swindler, and S. M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 153.

[2] Except where otherwise noted, all references to Shiʿism within this study are to be understood as shorthand for Twelver Shiʿism.

I came away from these encounters with a profound sense that the imams, despite having died (or in the case of the 12th imam, gone into occultation) more than a millennium ago, are nonetheless present to the faithful who love them, mourn for them, and seek them out with confidence and devotion. The degree to which this love permeates contemporary Shiʿi religious expression in Iran is unlike what I had experienced living among Sunni Muslims in Egypt and Yemen. Though saint veneration is a common religious phenomenon and many Sunni friends exhibited particular devotion to the Prophet, imam-veneration felt unique.

When I began my study of Shiʿism, I conceptualized Sunni/Shiʿi differences in terms of historical disputes over succession. It seemed simple: Sunnis believe that Muḥammad's authority passed to the caliphs, and the Shiʿa believe it passed on to the imams. But during my time in Iran, it became quickly apparent that there was much more to this story. For many of my Shiʿi friends, doctrinal claims about succession and the superiority of the imams over the Sunni caliphs were peripheral to the lived rituals, the stories, prayers, and tears that paid testament to the imams. The emotional connection to the imams in people's everyday lives was paramount. This undeveloped observation helped spark my interest in the historical development of Sunni and Shiʿi identities.

What makes Sunni and Shiʿi Islam distinct from one another? Why are the categories mutually exclusive?

As a teacher, I encourage my students to question the categories invoked by any speaker or writer. It is particularly critical to examine assumptions about religious categories, and readers may already be wondering about the categories I used to frame the questions above. What do I mean by "Sunni" and "Shiʿa"? And how do I know that they are mutually exclusive?

Defining a category that includes vast numbers of human beings is elusive and problematic; religious categories are no exception. There can be no definitive answer to the question of what defines "Sunni" and "Shiʿi" Islam, precisely because these terms denote living traditions characterized by organic and evolving relationships with, and within, their diverse environments. The field of religious studies grapples with this dilemma; it is a scholarly discipline committed to the study of undefinable categories of human expression. The inability to firmly define a religious group or tradition, however, does not make a category unusable. In the case of Sunni and Shiʿi Islam, millions of people—today and through most of Islamic history—have used these terms to identify themselves. Each of the categories is, as J. Z. Smith might say, a "native category."[3] And so the attempt to understand the characteristics that give shape to these categories must center on the people who have adopted these terms for themselves, exploring the motives and contexts of their use. Why do people invoke these categories? And what is the significance of identifying oneself and one's community in such terms?

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[3] J.Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies,* ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269.

Islamic Studies, as a discipline in the western academy, is not known for consistent integration of theories of religion into its research. The paths of scholarship on Islam have been charted mainly by historians who, while capable, felt little need to specify how they understood the nature of their object of study or their own relationship to that study. This has begun to change,[4] particularly as debates initiated by the late Edward Said in *Orientalism* have peaked in recent years. In subfields like the study of Shiᶜism, however, much of the groundwork remains under-theorized, limiting the usefulness of its inquiries for anyone beyond this small niche of academic inquiry.

Most western scholarship on Islam has used the term "Sunni" as roughly synonymous with "Muslim." That is, Sunni Islam has been treated as the normative, mainstream version of Islam.[5] And most discussions of "Islam" in western academic

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[4] The trend toward greater utilization of theory can be seen, for example, in Richard Martin's (ed.) *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* 2nd Edition (New York: Oneworld, 2011), or his co-edited volume with Carl Ernst, *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism,* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2010).

[5] This is an easily observable reality, a truism within the field. Marshall Hodgson discusses it briefly in *The Venture of Islam,* 3 volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), I: 39-40. A simple survey of the works of some of the major scholars of Islam in the 20th century, such as Goldziher, Caetani, and Watt, verifies the matter.

(and non-academic) literatures are in fact treatments of Sunni Islam.[6] Shiʿi Islam has largely been regarded as the "other," less-authentic, sectarian "branch" of Islam. Despite the bias intrinsic to this conception, this is neither an entirely unreasonable nor an intentionally unfair approach. First, it is rooted in history: early modern Europeans encountered the "Islamic world" primarily, or at least most directly, through their engagements with the Ottoman Empire, an officially Sunni empire. European access to Shiʿi texts was quite limited until well into the 20th century. Much of what was "known" about Shiʿism, therefore, was apprehended through the lens of Sunni interpretations.[7] In addition to these historical factors is the demographic reality that approximately 85% of the global Muslim population identifies as Sunni.[8]

The adoption of Sunni Islam as the starting point and normative representation of Islam has ramifications. Even some of the best scholarship on Shiʿism is affected by this perception. It is evident, for example, in the title of Marshall Hodgson's a seminal 1955 essay, "How Did the Early Shiʿa Become Sectarian?"[9] His question frames Shiʿism as the sectarian other, a way of thinking that characterizes many scholars' work today.[10]

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[6] The irony is not lost on me that I am doing something very similar to Shiʿism within this project by using the term to mean a particular type of Shiʿism, namely Twelver Shiʿism. And the relevance of this entire project to Ismāʿīlī and Zaydī forms of Shiʿism, though infrequently made explicit, should not be forgotten.

[7] See Etan Kohlberg, "Western Studies of Shi'a Islam," in *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution,* ed. Martin Kramer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 31-44; Hodgson, *Venture of Islam,* I: 39-40.

[8] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population," (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, October 2009), 7-8.

[9] Marshall Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian?" *JAOS* 75, no. 1 (1955): 1-13 [reprinted in *Shīʿism*, ed. Etan Kohlberg (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 3-16].

The secondary literature on Shiᶜism displays three basic approaches. The first approach prioritizes the propositional and normative discourses within Shiᶜism, specifically theology and law. For Hodgson, the origins of Shiᶜism were most clearly traced to the teachings of the sixth Shiᶜi imam, Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765).[11] Etan Kohlberg, who has produced some of the most formative work in the field, emphasized theological developments in the 9th and 10th centuries, highlighting in particular the doctrine of the *ghayba* (occultation of the twelfth imam).[12] Despite differences in emphases, both of these scholars effectively define Shiᶜism as a set of beliefs, and their approach remains common among those who study early and classical Shiᶜism. For example, while conceding that doctrines of the imamate were still in formation well after the occultation of the twelfth imam, Hossein Modarressi placed the teachings of the imams and their followers at the center of his *Crisis and Consolidation*, a remarkably helpful contribution to understanding the development of Shiʿism.[13] Modarressi's understanding of what the early Shiʿi communities believed has been contested by some, most notably by Mohammad Amir-Moezzi. The latter's *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism* highlights a different selection of teachings that are attributed to the imams in key 8th and 9th century sources.[14] The starkly contrasting—though not necessarily contradictory—presentations of Modaressi and Amir-Moezzi have unnecessarily polarized scholarly research on early Shiʿism. Regardless of their differences, both (like Hodgson and Kohlberg), have debated the nature of Shiʿism in terms of the evolution of religious beliefs. Many excellent studies have followed in the wake of their research,[15] including those by Said Amir Arjomand,[16] Andrew Newman,[17] and Maria Dakake.[18]

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[10] I am not using "sect" in the Weberian sense. Max Weber's use of the term has rarely proven helpful in Muslim contexts: see Michael Cook, "Weber and Islamic Sects," in *Max Weber and Islam,* ed. Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schluchter (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 273-279. Instead, I mean the term to apply more generally to a type of religious community which perceives itself to represent a higher or more complete fulfilment of their religion than other groups within the same broadly-construed religious tradition. Cf. W. M. Watt, "The Great Community and the Sects," in *Theology and Law in Islam,* ed. G. E. von Grunebaum, (Wiesbaden, 1971), 25-36 [reprinted in *Early Islam: Collected Articles,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 173-184].

[11] Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shiᶜa," 9-13.

[12] Etan Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ᶜashariyya," *BSOAS* 39, no. 3 (1976), 521-534.

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[13] Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shiʿite Islam: Abū Jaʿfar ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmite Shīʿite Thought,* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1993).

[14] Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam,* translated by David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). This illuminating work on early Shiʿi esoteric beliefs—specifically in relationship to the imamate—has been followed by a number of excellent articles. Several of them have been recently translated and collected into one invaluable volume: *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam: Beliefs and Practices,* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

[15] This can be seen less directly in the work of some concurrent scholarship like the *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shīʿite Iran* by Henry Corbin.

[16] Said Amir Arjomand provides his reflection into the theoretical components of his research in *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shiʿite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984). His utilization of Weberian theories of social change to explain the role of Shiʿism in the socio-political shifts within Safavid and Qajar societies remains a valued contribution. His definition of Shiʿism as a "world religion," however, falls into this general approach of focusing on the teachings of the imams and their immediate followers: 27-28, 32-45. My research here nuances his general trajectory of when and how Shiʿi devotions to the imams began: 29-31.

[17] Many of the scholars within this approach are particularly sanguine regarding the reliability of Shiʿi sources on the teachings of the imams. Even Modarressi and Amir-Moezzi largely proceed from this

A second approach emphasizes the question of succession to the Prophet’s role as leader of the Muslim community. This is the issue that dominated classical Sunni-Shiʿi polemical writings. The debates over the comparative merits of Abū Bakr (the first Sunni caliph) and ʿAlī (the first Shiʿi imam), for example, is vast, to say the least.[19] Whether it is possible or useful to trace key concepts related to Shiʿi or Sunni Islam to that crisis of leadership is debatable, but the importance of the affair is undeniable. The term “Shiʿism” alone points to this issue. The Arabic word *shīʿa* (partisan) is a shortened version of *shīʿat ʿAlī* (partisans of ʿAlī). Contemporary scholarship of that crisis exists under the long shadow cast by Wilferd Madelung’s oft-cited work, *Succession to Muhammad*.[20] Among the contributions of this work is Madelung’s persuasive demonstration that there likely *was* a real dispute over leadership after the death of the Prophet. This is no small point, for many western scholars had privileged Sunni

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assumption. Andrew Newman, however, has provided a more detailed evaluation of the major Shiʿi collections of hadith in his *The Formative Period of Twelver Shiʿism: Ḥadīth as Discourse Between Qum and Baghdad* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2000). Newman has shown the degree to which the particular collections of Shiʿi hadith reflect various efforts to shape the normative content of Shiʿism.

[18] Maria Massi Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shiʿite Identity in Early Islam,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). This work explicitly attempts to challenge the two approaches which are described below wherein Shiʿism is described as either a succession dispute or simply a reaction to the al-Ḥusayn’s martyrdom. Dakake posits that early Shiʿi identity mainly revolved around the concept of *wilāya* (allegiance) which the Shiʿa believed to be deserved by ʿAlī and the imams.

[19] See, for example, Asma Afsaruddin, *Excellence and Precedence: Medieval Islamic Discourse on Legitimate Leadership,* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 271-280.

[20] Wilferd Madelung, *Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). See also his short, but informative piece, “Shīʿism in the Age of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs,” in *Shīʿite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions,* ed. and trans. L Clarke (Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, 2001), 9-18. Cf ibid, “Shiism: An Overview,” ER2

accounts of the affair and treated Shiᶜi claims about the crisis as an anachronistic projection.[21]

Emphasizing the original dispute of succession is in keeping with a straightforward reading of classical Muslim sources, which often linger on that question. Further, it provides the basis for a manageable rendering of Shiᶜi origins—a succinct explanation in which the Sunni-Shiᶜi split is framed as a succession dispute that led to the evolution of separate religious communities.[22] An added benefit of this approach for teachers is that it disrupts the perception of Shiᶜism as something less authentically Islamic than Sunni Islam. Indeed, this has been one of the lasting contributions of Madelung's *Succession to Muḥammad*: the book renders it difficult to view Sunni narratives of Islamic origins as more reliable than many Shiᶜi ones. Using the issue of succession as a starting point can be particularly useful in general surveys of Shiᶜism. One of the most popular overviews of the topic in English is Moojan Momen's *An Introduction to Shiᶜi Islam.* In this eminently readable work, Momen provides a phenomenological presentation of Shiᶜism designed to understand the religion in a manner similar to that of its adherents. An emphasis on the succession dispute is in keeping with this goal.[23] A similar approach was taken by S. H. M. Jafri.[24]

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[21] Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi collects a few examples of this tendency with regard to the *ghadir khumm* accounts: *Shīᶜism: Imāmate and Wilāyat*, (Canada: Al-Ma'arif Books, 1999), chapter 3.

[22] Consider Wilfred Cantwell Smith's remarkable statement in *Modern Islam in India*: "We have not given the Shi'ah group separate treatment in this study of the changes wrought in Islam by modern social processes because there is nothing in the differences between Sunni and Shi'ah fundamentally relevant to those processes. The two groups diverge over what answers are to be given to questions which today do not arise": quoted by Keith Hjortshoj in "Shiᶜi Identity and Muharram in India," in *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution,* ed. Martin Kramer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 290.

A third approach to Shiʿism has drawn on trends in religious studies and has utilized applicable research methodologies from the fields of sociology and anthropology. These studies have typically emphasized distinctive Shiʿi practices and rituals. The most prominent and frequently discussed of these rituals are those related to the commemoration of the death of the third imam, al-Ḥusayn. This grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad was killed, along with his family and many of his followers, on the plains of Karbalāʾ in 680. Each year on ʿĀshūrāʾ, the tenth day of the month of Muḥarram, Shiʿi Muslims around the world mark this event with dramatizations, processions, and/or self-flagellations. These public performances are stark indicators of the "difference" of Shiʿism. As such, they have often served as the focal point of many Sunni-Shiʿi conflicts.[25]

Focusing on this particular manifestation of Shiʿism, some have pointed to the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn at Karbalāʾ as *the* event from which Shiʿism emerged. The historical basis for this perspective is sound. It is well-documented that a group of "penitents" (*tawwābūn*) in the late-7th century were so moved with remorse over having not helped al-Ḥusayn's party that they took up arms against the ruling Umayyad authorities in the face of insurmountable odds. These early Shiʿi—or "proto-Shiʿi"[26]—martyrs helped inspire generations of resistance in the name of the Prophet's family against injustice. Within a century of al-Ḥusayn's death, a revolution toppled the Umayyad Empire. The revolution was energized by widespread desires to reinstate the Prophet's family members to their rightful positions of authority. And though the triumph of the ʿAbbāsids came to be regarded as a betrayal of Shiʿi aspirations rather than a fulfillment of them,[27] new public commemorations and religious observances were permitted to flourish.[28] For some scholars, these rituals mark Shiʿism's real debut, and thus are treated as the religion's most definitive feature. David Pinault, whose *The Shiites* has been a major reference point in the field for over two decades, places the Muharram rituals at the foreground of his work on Shiʿism.[29] This approach is also apparent in another popular survey, Heinz Halm's *Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution.*

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[23] Momen's *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shiʿism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) is one of the most popular surveys of Shiʿism in English. In it, the author provides a phenomenological approach to Shiʿism which presents the tradition as many Shiʿi Muslims conceive of it themselves. Momen has suggests therein that Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims do not differ significantly according to ritual or doctrine, but the primary difference is according to the dispute over succession: xiii.

[24] S. H. M. Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shiʿa Islam* (London: Longman, 1979).

[25] See H. Laoust, "Les Agitations Religieuses à Baghdād aux IV^{e} et V^{e} siècles de l'Hégire," in *Islamic Civilization, 950-1150: Papers on Islamic History III,* ed. D. S. Richards (London: William Clowes & Sons Limited, 1973), 169-186.

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[26] Because Twelver Shiʿism was not an intelligle term until at least the 9th century, it is more precise to use the term "proto-Shiʿa" for those historical persons who lived before this time but whom are claimed to represent the tradtion by later Shiʿa. Similarly, "proto-Sunni" will occasionally be used for similar purposes.

[27] This is discussed further in chapter four.

[28] M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of ʿĀshūrāʾ in Twelver Shīʿism,* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 153-154.

[29] Granted, Pinault is working with Shiʿism precisely because of his research on Shiʿi rituals in South Asia. But the way he frames his overview of Shiʿism is important. See *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community,* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 3-5.

Halm refers to the passion play rituals in Muḥarram as "the true core of religious observance of Twelver Shi'ism."[30] The insightful works of Mahmoud Ayoub and Hamid Dabashi also follow this general approach.[31]

Despite the undeniable erudition of all of these scholars and the invaluable contributions of the above studies, there remain perplexing questions regarding how Sunni and Shiʿi Islam came to be conceived as distinct from and exclusive of one another.[32] While each of the approaches mentioned captures a genuine aspect of Sunni-Shiʿi sectarian debates, the historical record and early texts complicate the categories at every turn.[33] Teachings attributed to the revered scholar-imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq, for example, do not lend themselves to being used as guideposts to the distinctiveness of Shiᶜism. Leaving aside the historical questions about what these imams actually taught, much of what they are reported to have said is not at odds with the four major Sunni schools of law.[34] Furthermore, as Devin Stewart helpfully demonstrated, there is an identifiable history of Shiᶜi scholars practicing Sunni schools of law (particularly the Shāfiᶜī school).[35] Likewise, the question of ᶜAlī's claim to rightful succession to the Prophet cannot be understood solely through the lens of later conceptions of Sunni and Shiᶜi Islam. There were many opinions on the matter in the 7th and 8th centuries CE, and not all of those who believed ᶜAlī was the preferred candidate can sensibly be called "Shiᶜa"—at least not with the same parameters of meaning later inherent in the category. The conviction that ideal leadership ought to be the exclusive domain of someone in the Prophet's family was a sentiment which extended far beyond the bounds of "Shiᶜism."[36] Tracing the Sunni- Shiᶜa divide to al-

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[30] Heinz Halm, *Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution,* tr. Allison Brown (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), x. The updated and expanded edition of this work is titled *The Shiites: A Short History* tr. Allison Brown (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007).

[31] See Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam.* This work helpfully conveys the general mood of sorrow and consolation which permeates the literature of the present study. His work will be discussed further in chapter five. For H. Dabashi, see especially his book, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest,* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011), where he reads the history of Shiʿism through what he calls the "Karbala complex."

Both Ayoub and Dabashi approach Shiʿism in a way that has deep consonance with the present study. My own difference with their descriptions, besides attempting to limit my discussion to a slightly more confined context (both temporally and textually), is that I would contend that they put too much emphasis on stories of al-Ḥusayn and ʿĀshūrāʾ. As I go on to argue (particularly in chapter four, but implicitly throughout), I think the broader meta-narrative of salvation history deserves more consideration. That al-Ḥusayn is the most visibly and distinctly remembered of the imams does not detract from the fact that the significance of ʿĀshūrāʾ is dependent upon the larger cosmic narrative structure.

[32] It should also be noted that a few unique works do not fit nicely into the broad approaches which I have outlined here. Of particular note is Najam Haider's *The Origins of the Shīʿa: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kūfah,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Here Haider explores early Shiʿi communal boundaries through the lens of specific ritual practices other than the ʿĀshūrāʾ commemorations.

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[33] One of the most telling signs of how blurry the boundaries between Sunni and Shiᶜi identities were, even into the classical period, is the difficulty of assigning historical figures as one or the other. Examples include Abū Ṣalt (see Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 86-87) and Abū Mikhnāf (see Khalil Athamina, "Abu Mikhnaf," EI^3).

[34] Al-Bāqir is considered a thoroughly reliable transmitter of hadith in most Sunni works: W. Madelung, "Bāqer, Abū Jaᶜfar Moḥammad," EIr. And al-Ṣādiq is known to have been a teacher of major Sunni scholars like Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik b. Anas, and Wāṣil b. ᶜAṭāʾ: M. Hodgson, "D̲jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiḳ," EI^2.

[35] Devin Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998).

[36] See I. Goldziher, C. van Arendonk, and A. S. Tritton, "Ahl al-Bayt," EI^2; C. van Arendonk and W. A. Graham, "S̲h̲arīf," EI^2; Kazuo Morimoto (ed.), *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: The Living Links to the*

Ḥusayn’s death is equally problematic, for the commemoration of his martyrdom (particularly in medieval contexts) was not confined to groups that could be called Shiʿa. The dramatic slaughter of the Prophet’s grandson at Karbalāʾ was a gross injustice in the eyes of many Muslims at the time, and the event inspired Sunni commemorations for centuries as well.[37] The tragedy of ʿĀshūrāʾ is not the property of the Shiʿa alone.

And so I return to the question which Hodgson asked over fifty years ago: how did the Shiʿa become sectarian? In many ways, this remains the driving question behind the current dissertation, though for me the question means something different than it did for Hodgson. I take it for granted that Shiʿism is no more “sectarian” than Sunni Islam. Each group has historically been defined (though in various ways) in relationship to the other. For the most part, these two framings of Islam are exclusive of one another, and yet each is dependent upon the other. The question, therefore, should not be how Shiʿism *actually* came to be sectarian, which implies that the Shiʿa splintered off from the rest of Islam at some point in history. Rather, to my mind the question is how did Shiʿism come to be generally *understood* as sectarian? Or perhaps more broadly: how and why did these two fundamental categories—“Sunni” and

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Prophet, (London: Routledge, 2012). The success of the ‘Abbāsid revolution is further testament of this reality.

[37] See Mohammad-Dja‘far Mahdjoub, “The Evolution of Popular Eulogy of the Imams Among the Shi‘a” tr. and adapted by John R. Perry, in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi‘ism*, ed. S. Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988): 65-67; Ali J. Hussain, “The Mourning of History and the History of Mourning: The Evolution of Ritual Commemoration of the Battle of Karbala,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 1 (2005), 85; Megan Reid, “ʿĀshūrāʾ: Sunnism,” EI^3.

"Shiᶜa"—come to be meaningful at all? Although fewer efforts have been expended to find the origins of "Sunni Islam,"[38] the terms Sunni and Shiᶜa exist in reciprocal relationship. Each of them can be defined only in light of the other, and neither can stand alone. Any attempt to understand one, therefore, is simultaneously a journey into the other.[39] Within the current study, I explore these issues through a less trodden approach, one that places the concepts of narrative,[40] memory,[41] and culture at the center of the discussion.[42]

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[38] This is largely due to the assumption that the origin of Islam is synonymous with the origin of Sunni Islam. However, some recent comments on this question should be noted: Patricia Crone, "Uthmāaniyya," EI^2; D. W. Brown, "Sunna," EI^2; Afsaruddin, *Excellence,* 20; Abbas Barzegar, "Remembering Community: Historical Narrative in the Formation of Sunni Islam" (PhD diss., Emory Univerisity, 2010).

[39] Some others who have pointed to this: Christopher Melchert, "Imāmīs Between Rationalism and Traditionalism," in *Shīᶜite Heritage: Essays on Classical and Modern Traditions,* ed. and trans. L. Clarke (Binghamton: Global Publications, 2001), 282-283; Afsaruddin, *Excellence and Precedence,* 3-4. An interesting example of this can also be seen in Sean Anthony's attempt trace the development of early narratives of Ibn Saba': *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba' and the Origins of Shī'ism,* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). In the process of exploring some particular Sunni accounts of how Shiᶜism developed, he gains insights into how Sunni identity itself was evolving: 100-103.

[40] It is helpful to place these texts in relationship to questions of narrativity to gain a fully nuanced appreciation for, and understanding of, their role in the production of culture. By highlighting the narratological nature of the writings on the imams, the literary elements can be brought into greater relief, such as emplotment, focalization, and emotions. The term "narrative" has recently become as ubiquitously used in a variety of disciplines and discourses as it has become semantically muddled: see Marie-Laure Ryan, "Toward a Definition of Narrative," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative,* ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 22-23. Despite the fact that narratology has blossomed into its own scholarly field of inquiry, narratologists themselves struggle to articulate a mutually-agreeable definition of narrative: see Marie-Laure Ryan, "Narrative," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laurie Ryan, 344-348 (London: Routledge, 2005); Gerald Prince, "Surveying Narratology," in *What is Narratology,* edited by Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, 1-16 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003); Ryan, "Toward a Definition of Narrative," 22-35.

On emplotment, see Hilary P. Dannenberg, "Plot," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* eds. Herman et al, 435-439; H. Porter Abbott, "Story, Plot, and Narration," in *Cambridge Companion,* ed. Herman, 39-51.

On focalization, see Manfred Jahn, "Focalization," in *Cambridge Companion,* ed. Herman, 94-108; Göran Nieragden, "Focalization and Narration: Theoretical and Terminological Refinements," *Poetics Today* 23, 4 (2002): 685-697; Eva Broman, "Narratological Focalization Models—A Critical Survey," in *Essays on Fiction and Perspective,* ed. Göran Rossholm (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004): 57-89.

On emotion in narratives, see David S. Miall, "Affect and Narrative: A Model of Response to Stories," *Poetics* 17, (1989): 259-272; Ralf Schneider, "Emotion and Narrative," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* ed. Herman et al, 136-137; Herman, "Cognition, Emotion, and Consciousness," in *Cambridge Companion*, 245-259.

[41] Collective/social memory studies is often traced to the writings of Maurice Halbwachs, especially his *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1925) [new edition: Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952; reprint: Paris: Mouton, 1975], and his *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950) [2nd rev., aug. ed., Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968]. Other scholars, such as Marc Bloch, were also influential in the early development of this perspective. See his "Memoire collective, tradition et coutume," *Revue de Synthese Historique* 40, (1925): 73-83. More recent studies which have built on their ideas include Marie Noelle Bourguet, Lucette Valensi, and Nathan Wachtel (eds.), "Between Memory and History," special issue of *History and Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (October 1986): 207-400; Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique* 65, (Spring-Summer 1995): 125-33, originally published as "Kollectives Gedachtnis und kulturelle Identitat," in *Kultur und Gedachtnis*, ed. Jan Assman and Tonio Holscher (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), 9-19; Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History,* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review* 102, (1997): 1386-1403; Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies,* tr. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[42] The definition of culture has gone through many re-articulations over the past few decades and a number of scholars have cautioned against its use or even called for its abandonment altogether. Edward Said raised serious questions about the possibility of representing *other* cultures: *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient,* with a new afterword (New York: Penguin, 1995), 325. And building on his ideas, Lila Abu-Lughod mounted a full-blown criticism of the concept: "Writing Against Culture," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present,* ed. R. Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991): 137-162. In each case, and with others of a similar viewpoint, the main concern with the use of "culture" as concept lies in its inherently generalizing and, arguably, reifying quality. Despite their insightful points, the complete abandonment of the idea of culture may not be the best solution. In part, I agree here with Robert Brightman that any attempt to replace or transcend the term culture must presume a stable definition of culture with determined and fixed implications which represents the object of rejection. The very act of abandonment is a reifying and essentialist project which itself presupposes a stability to

A large proportion of the research on early and classical Islam has been preoccupied with what *happened*. The search for the historical Muḥammad, the origins of the Qur'an, and the nature of the early "believer's movement" continue to be fascinating and stimulating areas of inquiry. I would argue, however, that the results of these efforts tell us very little about the lives of the vast majority of Muslims either historically or today. As a result, we learn from them relatively little about Islam as a religion. Far more influential in the development of a community than what occurred in its "beginnings"—religious or otherwise—is how those beginnings are remembered. The way human beings remember events or experiences is always at some variance with the actual occurrence itself. Furthermore, individuals do not remember in isolation. All memory is socially mediated within a community. Memory is contingent upon there being a meaningful reason to retain certain details over others, and meaning can only be supplied through an individual's relationship to a social context.[43]

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the term culture which it has never had: see Robert Brightman, "Forget Culture: Replacement, Transcendence, Relexification," *Cultural Anthropology* 10, 4 (1995): 509-546. By speaking of the production of culture, I am invoking precisely some of the criticisms of the term: culture is not primordial, it is created; it is not static, it changes; it is not ahistorical, but in direct relationship to specific historical contexts; and it includes both ideas and practices. Perhaps most importantly, culture does not need to be internally coherent, though individual discourses or practices within a cultural setting may have significant coherence at specific moments in particular contexts. The notion of culture does involve a level of generalization, however. But this also applies to the idea of community and group identity, even if they are reduced to a particularized level. Ultimately, any conversation about human community ought to consider the shortcomings which apply to the use of culture. But if there can be any discussion of social structure at all, at any level, then the cautious use of culture need not be abandoned. The current project is focused on the way new symbols of cultural significance gained currency in a particular community in history.

[43] This concept is commonly referred to as "collective memory," but some scholars have steered away from the latter in favor of "historical memory," "cultural memory," "public memory," or "social

In the present study, the general discourse on social memory is tested against the literature on the imams in order to better assess the place and function of the literature within the development of Shi‘i culture. In this light, I use the term social memory to refer to the general process of remembering and transmitting certain accounts (and not others) from the near and distant past which can only be done in relationship to the social groups with which the individual is connected.

In terms of Sunni and Shiᶜi communal boundaries: what actually happened at “memorable” moments of history—be it the dispute over Muḥammad’s succession at Ṣaqīfa, the civil war culminated at Ṣiffīn, or al-Ḥusayn’s martyrdom at Karbalāʾ--is far less determinative in the production and sustainment of “difference,” than how those places are situated into the narrative of the community. The Sunni-Shiᶜi divide, therefore, cannot be reduced to the teachings of the imams (or their followers), a

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memory.” In each case, the intended meaning is nearly the same, though occasionally slight differences are sketched: Cattell and Climo, *Social Memory and History*, 4, 5. Generally, for reasons discussed by James Fentress and Chris Wickham, I prefer to use “social memory”: *Social Memory,* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), ix-x. See also, Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, (1998): 105-40, especially 112.

To view texts of historical writing through the lens of social memory is primarily an attempt to foreground the collective and communal nature of historical writing. In this way, the individual author of each text must be understood in relationship to the community for which he or she writes and, perhaps most importantly, through the needs of the community that remembers what the historian has recorded. The vantage point afforded by such a perspective has recently been helpful to scholars in a wide variety of fields, including history, religion, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. For a discussion of the general contours of this field of research, see, James V. Wertch, “Collective Memory,” in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, edited by Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch, 117-137 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For other definitions, see, Cattell and Climo, *Social Memory and History,* 3-5; Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory,* ix-xii; Burke, *Varieties*, 45.

debate over succession, or even the rituals of ʿĀshūrāʾ—though it is the rituals that move us closest to my goal. All of these issues have assigned roles within the larger meta-narrative of salvation history.[44]

Why were particular stories more memorable than others? How did a meta-narrative emerge from these stories? How has that narrative been sustained?

We now arrive at the focus of this project. I contend that what goes farthest toward making Twelver Shiʿism coherent as a category is a "constitutive narrative"[45]—a broadly observable way of understanding history and a community's place in that history. Manifestations of this meta-narrative can be seen in nearly every form of Shiʿi art, ritual or literature, but this study focuses on the constitutive narrative seen in the Shiʿi biographies of the imams. From the 10th century, Shiʿi writers began compiling the life stories of all twelve imams into combined works that I refer to as collective biographies of the imams. In this way, a single book could provide all of the most critical information and accounts about all twelve of the imams. This genre of Shiʿi literature saw impressive expansion and development over subsequent centuries and into the present time.[46] The five works upon which I have chosen to focus are taken from what I consider the formative stage of this genre, the 10th to 12 centuries.[47] As such, they provide a unique window into the development of Shiᶜism as a religious community producing its own identity and culture.

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[44] I hope it is clear that I am not trying to provide a definitive theory or definition for how to understand Shiʿism. Each of the studies mentioned have provided valuable insights. I am, however, attempting to present a particularly useful way to think about Shiʿism that has been largely absent from previous scholarship and which I believe illuminates critical aspects of Islamic discourses.

[45] Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart,* 153.

The chosen works have thus far received scant attention in western academia, despite the fact that most of them are relatively well-known (one has even been translated into English). Numerous scholars have made passing mention of the importance of these (or similar) books, but their full potential has not been mined.[48] The choices scholars have made in classifying these works into various genres reveal assumptions about what these works can tell us—assumptions that limit their applicability to broader scholarly inquiry.[49] They have been categorized variously as books of hadith,[50] history, or hagiography/devotion.[51] Scholars looking for hadith have tended to extract the sayings and teachings of the imams, focusing on the normative content therein to formulate Shiʿi theology and law. In turn, those who view the works as historical accounts have read them alongside other works dealing with the early Islamic period in an attempt to learn what happened and construct a historical narrative. Finally, those concerned with devotional material have focused on the encomia contained therein, utilizing the praises of the imams in Shiʿi rituals like *zīyāra,*

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[46] For a list of some of the important works of this genre from the formative period and beyond, see the appendix. Unless otherwise stated, all references to "biographies" of the imams are meant to refer to the collective biographies of the twelve imams and/or fourteen infallibles.

[47] They are: 1) al-Masᶜūdī's (attr.) *Ithbāt al-waṣīya*; 2) Al-Mufīd's *Kitāb al-irshād*; 3) Ibn Jarīr's (attr.) *Dalā'il al-imāma*; 4) Al-Ṭabrisī's *Iᶜlām al-warā'*; and 5) Ibn Shahrāshūb's *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib.* See chapter one for a discussion of each author and his work.

[48] The importance of this literature is mentioned by Kamran Aghaei, "Gendered Aspects of the Emergence and Historical Development of Shiᶜi Symbols and Rituals," in *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shiᶜi Islam,* edited by Aghaei (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 10; Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambride, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), see part II, especially 161-196 where she discusses stories about the imams in general; Lloyd Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-futuwwat in Iran* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1; John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering,* 19-22.

[49] The classification of the collective biographies of the imams as a coherent literary genre is a critical starting-point for this study. Human beings communicate within certain medium patterns which may be called genres. The structuralist heritage of genre theory does not prevent the notion of genre from remaining a highly useful—indeed, necessary—category for analyzing communication, especially

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literature. Although the assumption that one could critique a work in terms of the extent to which it conforms to the imagined rules of a supposed genre has been widely discredited, it remains evident that underlying conceptions of genre exert significant influence on the perceived meaning of a text. This is what makes the identification of genre so helpful. By grouping works together according to their similarity in form and content, one can gain insight into the expectations of both the author and reader, thereby providing a means for evaluating a certain aspect of a text's meaning for certain people at certain moments. Of course, the boundaries of a genre cannot be rigidly defined and many works may be said to participate in multiple genres simultaneously. Furthermore, genres are always changing, never static. It is precisely the evolution of the genre of collective biographies of the imams which this study addresses and by emphasizing the unique similarities between these works with regard to their genre, the significance of these works for shaping cultural meaning can be better appreciated. For a simple overview of the development and significance of genre studies for narratology, see Michael Kerns, "Genre Theory in Narrative Studies," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* eds. Herman et al, 201-205.

[50] For example, Kohlberg mentions al-Mufīd's *Kitāb al-irshād* in his survey of Shiʿi hadith, though he does distinguish it from other types of hadith collections: "Shīʿī Ḥadīth," *CHALUP,* 305.

[51] Within Ayoub's *Redemptive Suffering* alone we can see how differently these works have been categorized. He notes four genres of literature that he uses in his work: hadith material (where he lists *al-Irshād* among the works he uses), general historical works (listing *Ithbāt*), martyrdom/*maqatil* works (where none of our key works are listed), and works "relating to *ta'ziyah* and *ziyarah*" (where he lists *Manāqib* and *Dalāʾil*): 20-21. So while Ayoub has these works spread out across three different literary genres and does not place any of them in the *maqātil* category, others have placed all of these works solely into the *maqātil* category. Although I argue that the collective biographies of the imams represent their own genre, the works do significantly overlap with all of the genres listed here.

taʾzīya, and *rawẓa khan.* Elements of these works lend themselves to each use, but the collective biographies cannot be reduced to any one of these generic categories. My study is the first attempt to approach this literature from a broader angle that incorporates these and other elements and attempts to understand the narrative arc that holds them all together.

In my reading of these works, I have attempted to be continually mindful of the following questions: Why is a given account memorable rather than forgettable? What purpose does this memory serve? What are the assumptions about personhood, gender, power, authority, suffering, etc that undergird these stories? What feelings are evoked through this literature? What was the anticipated response from the reader/audience? How do the stories define the boundaries of the community?

It should be noted that I have not attempted to judge whether any event described within these works historically occurred. My concern is what this literature tells us about the community for which the works were written and by whom the works have been transmitted. My research makes no claims about the historical imams.[52] Religion is not determined by 'facts' of history. It is created through interpretations that are molded into memorable, shareable narratives in relationship to the needs of a community. This does not mean that the stories are fictional. Some of them may be, while others may not. But the factuality of the literature has little determinative value on the community's ultimate judgment of its truth.[53]

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[52] And I should add, therefore, that I am not seeking to discover the textual provenance of the narratives. Their origins and veracity are simply not the concern. I am interested in why they were remembered here. Why did they make sense to the authors of these biographies? What is the image of the imams projected in these particular collections and how do these collections relate to the circumstances of the Shiʿi community at the time? And, to a lesser extent, in what way might these biographies have contributed to the ongoing development of Shi'i identity over the next few centuries, and even up to the modern period?

The biographers of the imams were storytellers. This assertion may grate on the ears of some readers, so I want to clarify that in calling the biographers storytellers, I do not mean that they were unconcerned with historical facts and accurate information. Nor do I mean that they were the same as the "storytellers" (*quṣṣās*)[54] of classical Arabic contexts.[55] Rather I wish to connect them to storytelling in its broad sense, as a fundamental means by which people make sense of their own lives and identities. Even today, in our digital world of high-speed information and sophisticated scientific methods, we tell stories as a way to make sense out of pieces of information that relate to a particular context.[56] The process of constructing a story that makes sense—one that is both memorable and shareable—transcends the distinctions between fiction and non-fiction and between rationality and emotion.[57] To understand these concepts as mutually exclusive is to misapprehend the power of the story.

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[53] Admittedly, my own approach draws significantly from sociological theories of religion which prioritize the process of producing meaningful symbols within a total paradigm of thinking about the universal. I agree with Burton Mack, for example, in going beyond how individuals respond to the sacred due to their own personal needs and pressing larger questions about communities and collectives: "A Radically Social Theory of Religion," in *Secular Theories of Religion: Current Perspectives,* eds. Tim Jensen and Mikael Rothstein (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000), 123-136. Mack poses a question that I have tried to apply in this study as well: "Why does a group in the process of social formation produce the practices we call religion?" (129).

[54] See Ch. Pellat, "Ḳāṣṣ," EI^2.

[55] There is, however, a similarity and even historical overlap that should not go entirely unnoticed. See Mahdjoub, "The Evolution of Popular Eulogy of the Imams Among the Shi^{c}a," 54-79; Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs,* 175-182.

[56] See, for example, the exploration of this topic in relationship to modern Americans: Dan McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: The Stories Americans Live By* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Outline:

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapters two through five provide the main substance of my analysis. These are preceded by chapter one, which provides a historiographical overview of the genre under consideration. In this overview I locate the collective biographies within the larger Arabic and Near Eastern literary corpus of the classical Islamic period. In addition, I introduce the five works on which this study is focused, their authors, and their historical contexts. I attempt to make clear why I have chosen to classify the collective biographies as a genre and toward what end I am analyzing them.

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[57] On the problem with drawing a clear line between fiction and non-fiction, see Marilyn Robinson Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative: A Test Case Study in Perso-Islamicate Historiography* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980), 3-19. Cf. Cameron's discussion of the problem in relation to Christian hagiographical literatures: Averon Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 118-119.

On the relationship between rationality and emotion in discourse, see Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Ahmed's work is helpful, despite focusing on contemporary contexts in Europe and Australia, partly because she focuses on the "emotionality of texts": 12-16. As I show in the current study, particularly in chapter five, the biographies of the imams have an intended emotional effect attached to the content of the biographies which helps to produce and control (rather than contradict) the logic of the literature. In this regard, attention is given to what the texts do, rather than simply what they say.

In chapter two, I explore the birth narratives of the imams. These compelling stories indicate how the imams fit into a larger narrative of sacred history. The birth accounts offer an array of religious symbols that speak to the cosmic, as well as personal, significance of the imams lives. I use some accounts of ʿAlī's conception and birth as launching point before discussing narratives about the Mahdī's mother and the childhood feats of the al-Hādī. Among what can be drawn from these accounts, I show that each of these sections help orient us to the myriad of symbols and motifs utilized by the biographers to emphasize the uniqueness of the imams and the rightfulness their authority.

In chapter three, I focus on the embodied nature of the imams. Though often overlooked, the ways in which the imams' bodies are described, or how their bodily performances are remembered, give us unique clues to the authors conceived of the ideal human, individually and socially. Not only do accounts about the imams tell us something about assumptions of masculinity, but they also reveal the gendered nature of authority and corporeality. In the three cases of emphasis (al-Bāqir, al-Kāẓim, and, the ambiguously-gendered, imam-like Fāṭima), their idealized bodies attest to communal hopes and concerns.

Only in chapter four do I directly address the most famous aspect of the imams' lives: their suffering. Specifically, I probe the nature and significance of their suffering through the notion of betrayal, a concept which appears and reappears throughout the biographies. The ways the imams' betrayals are remembered reveal the broad social implications of their sufferings. Here I focus on examples from al-Ḥusayn, Muḥammad, al-Riḍá, al-Ḥasan, al-Ṣādiq, and al-ᶜAskarī. The diversity of examples here demonstrates how pervasive and critical the notion of betrayal is within this literature.

Finally, chapter five deals with the deaths of the imams and the manner in which the biographers negotiate a particular understanding of, and response to, those deaths. Focusing on al-Jawād and al-Sajjād, I show more clearly than in any other chapter how the memory of a community was evolving within and controlled by these biographies—both in terms of content and of meaning. The relationship between the narratives and the meaning of these stories for the community—in the logical and emotional aspects—concludes this study.

Within each chapter, I have focused on particular imams/infallibles for purposes of presentation and organization. Although each chapter's sections revolve around a single person, the sections are not about that person; for this study is not about the imams. Rather, each case is an example intended to show broader themes and motifs that go beyond the accounts of that person. The observations within each section typically apply to the other imams as well. I have tried to include numerous cross-references at various points to demonstrate this. Alternatively, on the occasion when a particular point was unique to a single imam or did not apply to certain other imams, I have tried to make that explicit.

The Fourteen Infallibles

For those unfamiliar with Shiʿi literature, keeping track of the names and identities of the twelve imams can be arduous. Further, as discussed in chapter one, the genre generally crystalized around the biographies of those who are often referred to as the "Fourteen Infallibles" (*arbaʿat ʿashar maʿṣūm*),[58] not just of the twelve imams. This group includes the Prophet and his daughter Fāṭima along with the imams. It seems prudent, therefore, to provide a brief introduction to each of these individuals here for reference purposes. Thus I am providing below the extended form of each person's name, along with his or her most famous honorifics,[59] generally agreed-upon death dates, and a brief note about historical context. Throughout the dissertation I consistently use one name for each individual, and I indicate that name in bold here. Some of the useful secondary literature on each person is provided in the footnotes.

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[58] This process of canonization of the fourteen infallibles seems to occur precisely during the period of history on which this study focuses. The *Ithbāt* does not delimit a particular section for Fāṭima's biography. Nor did al-Mufīd include sections on Muḥummad or Fāṭima in his *Kitāb al-Irshād.* Al-Ṭabrisī, though he added a substantial biography on Muḥammad, included only a few pages on Fāṭima. Ibn Jarīr's *al-Dalāʾil,* however, included a large section on Fāṭima, and was likely the first book to do so among the biographies of the imams. The inclusion of Muḥammad and Fāṭima's biographies alongside the twelve imams was picked up by Ibn Shahrāshūb and nearly all subsequent collective biographies of the imams follow this pattern. This became a defining feature of the genre: the collective biographies of the imams are almost always biographies of the fourteen infallibles. On this category, see Hamid Algar, "Čhahārdah Maʿṣūm," EIr.

[59] Traditional Arabic names contain several components. In addition to one's proper name (*ism*), such as Muḥammad, Fāṭima, or al-Ḥasan, most individuals were given a *kunya* (patronymic, beginning with *Abū* ("father of") or *Umm* ("mother of")), a *nasab* (indicating lineage, each generation being connected with *ibn* ("son of") or *bint* ("daughter of")), and a *nisba* (adjectival indicator typically specifying one's place of origin, such as "Egyptian," or vocation, such as "bookseller"—rarely used for the imams and therefore excluded from the present list with the notable exception of the eleventh imam). Further, some individuals, particularly those of social prestige, were provided with a *laqab* (honorific nickname)—sometimes several of them. I have provided the *kunya* of each of the infallibles in the parenthesis. Many of the classical Shiʿi sources use an imam's *kunya* as the preferred name of reference. Later medieval and modern sources tend to prefer the imams' *laqab*, the most famous of which I've provided after each *nasab*. My own choice for which name to adopt for consistent reference in this study (those indicated in bold)

Prophet: (Abū al-Qāsim) **Muḥammad** b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, al-Amīn (d. 11/632)**:** the prophet of Islam. He is said to have begun his mission in Mecca and established the first Muslim community in Medina in 622.[60]

Daughter of the prophet: (Umm Abīha) **Fāṭima** bt. Muḥammad, al-Zahrāʾ (d. 11/633)**:** the daughter of Muḥammad. Fāṭima is unique in her position at the nexus of the Prophet's family; in addition to being his daughter she is the husband of Imam ʿAlī and mother of Imams al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. She lived most of her life in Medina and died just a few months after her father.[61]

First imam: (Abū al-Ḥasan) **ʿAlī** b. Abī Ṭālib, Amīr al-Muʾminīn, (d. 40/661)**:** nephew and son-in-law of the Prophet. The Shiʿa generally adhere to a belief in his rightful

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relates to the names I felt were most commonly used in contemporary Shiʿi discourse or, in some cases, the name which I felt would best limit confusion for readers.

[60] The secondary literature on Muḥummad is vast. For general overviews, see F. Buhl and A. T. Welch, "Muḥammad: The Prophet's Life and Career," EI^2; Mahmoud Ayoub, "Muhammad the Prophet," in *Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925,* eds. Michael Cooperson and Shawkat Toorawa (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 268-287.

[61] See L. Veccia Vaglieri "Fāṭima," EI^2; Jean Calmard and M. A. Amir-Moezzi, "Fāṭema," EIr; Denise Soufi "The Image of Fāṭimah in Classical Muslim Thought" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1997); Hossein Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A bibliograhical Survey of Early Shi'ite Literature,* Volume I (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 17-22; Christopher P. Clohessy, *Fatima, Daughter of Muhammad,* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009).

inheritance of the Prophet's authority. Mainstream Sunni positions hold him to be the fourth of the "rightly-guided" caliphs, ruling from 656-661. He spent most of his final years trying to secure his unified leadership over the emerging empire but was assassinated without having achieved complete success.[62]

Second imam: (Abū Muḥammad) **al-Ḥasan** b. ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, al-Ṣibt, (d. 49/669-670): grandson of the prophet and son of ᶜAlī and Fāṭima. After his father's death, al-Ḥasan made a treaty with the main rival leader, the Umayyad Caliph Muᶜāwīya (d. 60/680). Al-Ḥasan spent the rest of his years in relative quiet in Medina.[63]

Third imam: (Abū ᶜAbd Allāh) **al-Ḥusayn** b. ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, al-Shahīd, (d 61/680): brother of the second imam and famed martyr at Karbalāʾ. After his brother's death and the death of Muᶜāwīya, al-Ḥusayn and seventy-one of his companions were killed by Umayyad forces on their way to meet supporters in Kūfa.[64]

Fourth imam: (Abū Muḥammad)[65] ᶜAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭalib, **al-Sajjād**, Zayn al-ᶜĀbidīn, (d. 94-95/712-714): son of the third imam. After the events at Karbalāʾ, he lived quietly, mostly in Medina, for his remaining years. Toward the end of his life he witnessed the Umayyad transition from Sufyānid to Marwānid lines of leadership as well as an array of unsuccessful anti-Umayyad rebellions.[66]

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[62] See Dwight M. Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Irak* (London: Luzac & Company, 1933), 27-53; Jafri, *Origins,* 58-129; Madelung, *Succession to Muḥammad*; [multiple authors], "ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib," *DMBI* [Trans. in *Encyclopedia Islamica,* III: 477-583]; E. Kohlberg and I. K. Poonawala, "ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb," EIr; Robert Gleave, "ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib," EI^3; B. Tahera Qutbuddin, "ᶜAli ibn Abi Talib," in Arabic *Literary Culture*, eds. Cooperson and Toorawa, 68-76; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival,* I: 1-17;

[63] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 66-78; Jafri, *Origins,* 130-173; L. Veccia Vaglieri, "(al-) Ḥasan b. ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib," EI^2; W. Madelung, "Ḥasan b. ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭāleb," EIr.

[64] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 79-87; Jafri, *Origins,* 174-221; L. Veccia Vaglieri, "(al-) Ḥusayn b. ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib," EI^2; W. Madelung, "Ḥosayn b. ᶜAlī: Life and Significance in Shiᶜism," EIr.

[65] Sometimes Abū al-Ḥasan; see *al-Irshād,* II: 137 (Eng: 380); *Iᶜlām,* 260; *Manāqib*, IV: 189.

Fifth imam: (Abū Jaᶜfar) Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī b. al-Ḥusayn, **al-Bāqir**, (d. 117/735)[67]: son of the fourth imam. He also lived a fairly quiet life in Medina, following his father's example of refusing to support any anti-Umayyad uprisings. Apparently taking an interest in the emerging discipline of hadith transmission, he gained a reputation as an important teacher.[68]

Sixth imam: (Abū ᶜAbd Allāh) Jaᶜfar b. Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī, **al-Ṣādiq**, (d. 148/765): son of the fifth imam. From his home in Medina, al-Ṣādiq followed the tradition of his father as a teacher. Although he is not known to have made any attempts at political power, he is often seen as a key figure for bringing attention to this particular lineage of descendants of the Prophet. He lived through the fall of the Umayyad Empire and the establishment of rule of the ᶜAbbāsid caliphs.[69] Twelver Shiᶜi legal traditions are often referred to as "Jaᶜfarī" law, on account of al-Ṣādiq's influence.

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[66] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 101-111; Jafri, *Origins,* 239-247; W. Madelung, "ᶜAlī b. Ḥosayn," EIr; E. Kohlberg, "Zayn al-ᶜĀbidīn," EI²; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival,* I: 33-36.

[67] Numerous other dates are also given in various sources, ranging from 114/732 to 118/736. See Kohlberg, "Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī b. Zayn al-ᶜĀbidīn," EI²; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival,* I: 37-38.

[68] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 112-119; Jafri, *Origins,* 247-255; E. Kohlberg, "Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī b. Zayn al-ᶜĀbidīn," EI²; Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shīᶜī Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000); W. Madelung, "Bāqer, Abū Jaᶜfar Moḥammad," EIr.

[69] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 129-141; Jafri, *Origins,* 259-288; M. Hodgson, "D̲jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiḳ," EI²; Robert Gleaves, "Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādeq: i. Life ii. Teachings," EIr; Omid Safi, "Jaᶜfar al-Sadiq," in *Arabic Literary Culture,* eds. Cooperson and Toorawa, 225-230.

Seventh imam: (Abū al-Ḥasan)[70] Mūsá b. Jaᶜfar b. Muḥammad, **al-Kāẓim**, (d. 183/799): son of the sixth imam. Al-Kāẓim inherited leadership over an increasingly fractured group of followers and spent his energies trying to secure his authority through his teachings. ᶜAbbāsid rulers were often suspicious of him and arrested him on occasion. Eventually, the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd kept him permanently under arrest, mostly in Baṣra and Baghdad until his death.[71]

Eighth imam: (Abū al-Ḥasan) ᶜAlī b. Mūsá b. Jaᶜfar, **al-Riḍá**, (d. 203/818): son of the seventh imam. The eighth imam spent most of his life in Medina but eventually attracted the interest of ᶜAbbāsid Caliph al-Maʾmūn (d. 218/833), who appears to have planned to appoint al-Riḍá as successor of the empire. The imam was killed before this came to fruition.[72]

Ninth imam: (Abū Jaᶜfar) Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī b. Mūsá, **al-Jawād**, al-Taqī, (d. 220/835): son of the eighth imam. He appears to have been a mere seven years old when he inherited the imamate. He too spent most of his life in Medina, though he was obliged to stay in Baghdad for brief periods several times.[73]

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[70] Abū Ibrāhīm also appears sometimes. Examples: *Ithbāt,*189; *Manāqib,* IV: 307, 312.

[71] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 152-160; E. Kohlberg, "Mūsā al-Kāẓim," EI2; Hamid Algar, "Imam Musa al-Kazim and Sufi Tradition," *Islamic Culture* 64, (1990): 1-14.

[72] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 161-169; Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography,* 70-106; Deborah G. Tor, "An historiographical re-examination of the appointment and death of ᶜAlī al-Riḍā," *Der Islam* 78, (2001): 103–128; Wilferd Madelung, "ᶜAlī al-Reżā," EIr; Tamima Bayhom-Daou, "ᶜAlī al-Riḍā," EI^3.

[73] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 188-197; Wilferd Madelung, "Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī al-Riḍā," EI^2; Shona Wadrop, "The Lives of the Imāms, Muḥammad al-Jawād and ᶜAlī al-Hādī and the Development of the Shīᶜite Organization" PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1988.

Tenth imam: (Abū al-Ḥasan) ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, **al-Hādī**, al-Naqī, (d. 254/868): son of the ninth imam. Like his father, al-Hādī inherited the imamate while still a child himself, probably around the age of eight. He was later forced by the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 247/861) to take up permanent residence in Sāmarrāʾ where he could remain under watch.[74]

Eleventh imam: (Abū Muḥammad) al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad, **al-ʿAskarī**, al-Naqī, (d. 260/873-4): son of the tenth imam. He grew up with his father in Sāmarrāʾ, living nearly his entire life under house arrest or general surveillance. Immense uncertainty about the imamate ensued following his death.[75]

Twelfth imam: (Abū al-Qāsim)[76] Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, **al-Mahdī**, al-Qāʾim, Ṣāḥib al-Zamān: son of the eleventh imam whose birth was kept a secret and therefore disputed by many. He is believed to have gone into a temporary *ghayba* (occultation) in 260/873-4 and into a long-term *ghayba* in 329/941. He is generally believed to be continually sustained supernaturally by God in his *ghayba* until the right time for his return at the dawn of the final apocalypse.[77]

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[74] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 209-216; Shona Wadrop, "The Lives of the Imāms, Muḥammad al-Jawād and ʿAlī al-Hādī;" W. Madelung, "ʿAlī al-Hādī," EIr.

[75] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 217-225; J. Eliash, "Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī," EI2; H. Halm, "Askarī," EIr.

[76] It is customary among the Shiʿa to avoid using the *kunya* or the *ism* of the twelfth imam when referring to him—typically, only a *laqab* is used. Numerous sources do not list his *kunya* and those that do typically just say that it is the same as the Prophet's *kunya* (ex: *Iʿlām,* 407). Using the Prophet's *ism* and *kunya* is generally understood by Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims to be otherwise prohibited. The ascription of this *ism* and *kunya* to the twelfth imam, therefore, accentuates the apocalyptic expectations surrounding his character.

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[77] See Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 226-241; J. M. Hussain, *The occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background*, (London: The Muhammadi Trust, 1982); J. G. J. ter Haar, "Muḥammad al-Ḳāʾim," EI^2.

Chapter One: Setting the Stage

> "Transformations of the collective memory are therefore inscribed in the logic of a system, while at the same time depending on the power relations between the groups carrying it: memories confront each other, intermingle, fuse, or erase each other, according to the destiny of the societies whose identity they help to define."
> -Nathan Wachtel[1]

> "If poetry is the 'archive of the Arabs,' biography is the archive of the Muslims."
> -Michael Cooperson[2]

Generalized observations about the social memory of the Twlever Shiᶜa in the medieval period must be understood loosely. The boundaries of any social group, including the Shiᶜa, are porous and ambiguous at specific places and moments. In fact, the fluid and unstable nature of lines dividing Sunni and Shiᶜi Muslims is precisely the dynamic against which I would suggest the biographies of the imams can most fruitfully be read. Even up to the 10th century there were groups such as "Sunni Twelvers" who participated in the ᶜĀshūrā commemorations of the tragedy of al-Ḥusayn.[3] This is testament to the range of interpretive possibilities which remained open at the same time that this literature began to take shape. The biographies, however, simultaneously dismantle the meaningfulness of some of those possibilities while also expounding an increasingly coherent discourse on the imams—both of which work in tandem toward solidifying the division between Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims.[4]

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[1] Nathan Wachtel, "Introduction," in Special Issue of *History and Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (October 1986): 216-217.

[2] Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography,* xi.

[3] On Sunni Twelvers, see Mahdjoub, "The Evolution of Popular Eulogy," 54-79.

The development of Sunni and Shiʿi Islams into conceptually and socially distinct (even antithetical) groupings took centuries to occur. It was never, of course, fully actualized and some Muslims have attempted, especially in the modern period, to try to reverse the process.[5] How, and why, Sunni and Shiʿi communities largely evolved in this manner is difficult to explain and no single angle could possibly provide a comprehensive answer. Various studies, however, have elaborated upon the legal differences, theological arguments, and political confrontations, just to name a few contributing factors. The present study is meant to contribute to an understanding of this complex historical process by focusing on Shiʿi social memory of the imams.

The specific type of literature which I isolate for study in this dissertation was first written by Shiʿi scholars in the 10th century. Two centuries later, the unique features of these biographies were largely in place, including its main structures, themes, and motifs. The collective biographies of the imams from this period, as with any genre, were written within specific intellectual and literary contexts that shaped the way the works were composed and received.

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[4] This situation might be fruitfully compared with complexities involved in the emergence of distinct Jewish and Christian identities in the first three centuries of the Common Era. Consider the comments by Daniel Boyarin: "In short, without the power of the orthodox Church and the Rabbis to declare people heretics and outside the system it remained impossible to declare phenomenologically who was a Jew and who was a Christian....it was frequently impossible to tell a Jewish text from a Christian text. The borders were fuzzy, and this has consequences": *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 15.

[5] See Rainer Brunner, "SHIʿITE DOCTRINE iii. Imamite-Sunnite Relations since the Late 19th Century," EIr.

The current study is the first attempt to identify the collective biographies of the imams as a unique genre. The utility of this decision can be assessed at the end of this study. The current chapter provides some of the background for understanding the collective biographies of the imams within their historical and literary contexts. Because this study focuses on five specific works, I provide a general introduction to each work and their authors. Building upon these historiographical excursions, I conclude with a brief summary of how this genre of literature contributes specifically to our understanding of the development of Shiʿi social memory of the period.

I.A. The Literary Context

In the two centuries prior to the 10th, scholarly communities across the Near East were in the process of major social changes. During this time—a period modern historians often refer to as the "classical age" of Islam—ruling and scholarly elites from Andalusia to the Indian sub-continent were establishing Arabic as the primary language for all major intellectual discourses.[6] The dramatic socio-religious developments during this time were accompanied by a proliferation of new literatures: historical, scientific, and philosophical, to name but a few. An urban culture of books and book-collection emerged, particularly among the educated classes in and around Baghdad, the seat of power for the ᶜAbbāsid Empire. The insatiable interests in books of all types, not to mention the willingness to invest financially in their production, were fueled by (and partly productive of) an immense "translation movement" in the 8th to 10th centuries. As Dimitri Gutas demonstrates in his work on this topic, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture,* this social phenomenon extended far beyond the bounds of the court or any specific group. He writes, "the support for the translation movement cut across all lines of religious, sectarian, ethnic, tribal, and linguistic demarcation. Patrons were Arabs and non-Arabs, Muslims and non-Muslims, Sunnīs and Shīᶜites, generals and civilians, merchants and land-owners, etc."[7] This remarkable cultural development manifested itself, at least in part, through the patronage of translators who could bring into Arabic the works of the great Greek philosophers, scientists, and doctors.

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[6] This was, of course, not just a phenomenon among Muslims. It was during the early part of the 10th century that the famous Gaonic rabbi, Saadia ben Joseph (d. 942), began writing in Arabic. An immense body of Judeo-Arabic literature followed in subsequent centuries.

In light of such a vibrant intellectual environment, it is clear that the task of exploring the literary context of our authors goes beyond simply naming the sources each individual author consulted. In only a few cases can we determine that any particular author in this study definitely had read a given written work (though where we can do so, these notes remain valuable and are discussed). Nonetheless, we can make some notes about a variety of literatures—and here I use "literature" loosely to refer to both written and oral compositions—which circulated in various forms during this time.[8] The literary horizon which lit the stage for the appearance of the biographies of the imams was rich and diverse, to be sure. Here, for simplicity sake, I divide it into two categories. First, there were Arabic works known to have circulated in scholarly circles at the time. This particularly refers to the early and classical Muslim sources which most immediately defined the parameters of meaningful discourse for our authors. But second, there is also a broader body Near Eastern literature (some of which were translated into Arabic but continued to be considered "foreign" works) which tends to have a less demonstrable relationship to our authors, but which informed the larger cultural milieu of the urban, educated classes at the time. A brief overview of each is in order.

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[7] Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ᶜAbbāsid Society (2nd-4th / 8th-10th centuries)* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 5.

Beginning with the latter, we can note several genres of writing which were geared towards conveying the life story of an important person. Ancient Greek (and later Roman) writers composed a variety of aretalogies, a type of literature which focused on the miraculous acts of a person, especially their divine qualities.[9] These writings were on occasion, but not solely, focused on gods of an imagined past. Philosophers later became a common subject for such writings; we can recall, for example, Plato's various writings on the teachings (but also the life and death) or Socrates. The school of peripatetic philosophers wrote biographies in a similar form in order to record the lives of their favored philosophers, such as the *Life of Pythagoras* by Aristoxenus.[10]

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[8] See Gregor Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read,* Revised edition in collaboration with and translated by Shawkat M. Toorawa (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 2-9.

[9] Moses Hadas and Morton Smith argued that aretology was the ancient literary form which set the stage for later Christian literatures, particularly the gospels: *Heroes and Gods: Spiritual Biographies in Antiquity*, (Freeport, NY: Books for Library Press, 1965); see also Howeard C. Kee, "Aretalogy and Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, 3 (Sept. 1973): 402-403). Hadas and Smith built their approach to this ancient literary form upon a few ancient Greek and Latin references to an *aretalogus*, a person whose job it was to recount the stories of acts performed by gods. This ancient genre is described by Hadas and Smith to have been

These early forms of what could be called biographical writings determined much of the manner in which later Christian literature developed. Patricia Cox Miller asserts, "By the beginning of the Imperial era," (a period ranging roughly from 31 BCE

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typified by a formal account of an important teacher or god which centered on the unique actions (aretai, "excellent deeds") of that character, especially miracles, and generally included a martyrdom account: *Heroes and Gods,* 3. The authors set these broad elements into relief through a comparison of Porphyry's (d. c. 305) *The Life of Pythagoras*, Philo's (d. c. 45) *On the Life of Moses*, Luke's (fl. 1st cent.) gospel account, and Philostratus's (d. c. 250) *The Life of Apollonius Tyanna*: 105-258. See also: Morton Smith, "Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretalogies, Divine Men, and the Gospels and Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90, 2 (June 1971): 174-199.

[10] Friedrich Leo called Aristoxenus the "Begründer der litterarischen Biographie": *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form,* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1901), 102. Arnaldo Momigliano has argued that the earliest Greek works which may have resembled biographies, as they would come to be known, likely appeared in the 5th century BCE—a period wherein the general notion of historiography was also emerging in Greek thought*: Development of Greek Biography*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 12 and 23-28; see also Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography,* 2nd edition (Grand Rapids; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2004), 68-69. In the 4th century BCE, Plato and Xenophon utilized important biographical elements in their writings on Socrates; and Xenophon continued to develop this approach, most notably in his Cyropaedia. Another work from this century which is strongly biographical in nature is Theopompus' Philippica, which is organized around the Greek king Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. The period of Greek history ushered in by Philip II, particularly after the Macedonian victory in 338 BCE, facilitated the intellectual climate most clearly associated with the stabilization of biography as a literary genre.

to 68 CE), "biography had gained currency as an established literary genre."[11] Some of the most influential biographies of Graeco-Roman literatures were written in the century following this era, such as the works of Plutarch and Seutonius,[12] not to mention the Christian gospels.[13] And, in turn, the gospel narratives—not just those canonized in the Christian New Testament—contributed to the general repertoire of literary forms that informed the way people recorded the life of a holy person. The Christian writings which have the most similarities with the biographies of the imams, however, are the "lives of the saints." These accounts of Christian heroes (mostly martyrs) were widely disseminated, immensely popular, and have been a productive place for research on the development of early Christian identities.[14] Martyrdom narratives, and collections of them, played a particularly significant role in giving expression to Christian ethical perspectives, political concerns, and communal boundaries.[15] Although the "acts of the martyrs," as they are known, may not neatly fit into some definitions of biography, they—like the "lives of the saints," or hagiography in general—relied heavily on many of the same motifs, themes, and devices as the more conventional biographies of the time.[16]

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[11] Patricia Cox [Miller], *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[12] Biography (bios, lit.: life) was a common Graeco-Roman genre. According to the first-century Greek writer Plutarch and other among his contemporaries, biographical writing was a subset of historical writing (istoria), though with particular conventions and intentions: Burridge, *What are the Gospels?,* 61-62.

[13] See Burridge's *What are the Gospels?* See also: Friedrich Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form*; D. R. Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography,* (Berkeley: University of California, 1928); Helene Homeyer, "Zu den Anfängen der friechischen Biographie," *Philologus* 106, (1962), 75-85; Albrecht Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie,* 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970); Ronald Syme, "History or Biography: The Case of Tiberius Caesar," *Historia* 23, (1974), 481-496; Charles H. Talbert, *What is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels,* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977)*;* Philip L. Shuler, *A Genre for the Gospels: The Biographical Character of Matthew,* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982)*;* Patricia Cox [Miller], *Biography in Late Antiquity*; Joseph Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and Ancient Political Biography,* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1985); David E. Aune, *New Testament in Literary Environment,* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 1988)*;* Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography*.

[14] Cf. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire.*

Although the majority of works which found an Arabic translation during the classical period were from Greek writings of a "non-literary and non-historical" nature,[17] Gutas also notes that many works from Syriac, Persian (Pahlavi), and Sanskrit were also making their way into Arabic in the 8th and 9th centuries.[18] Furthermore, many literary and historical works (from Greek and non-Greek sources) were given attention as well.[19] A variety of Persian literatures deserve mention in this discussion. There was, first of all, no small number of Persian-speaking Christians who were recording the lives of Christian saints and martyrs.[20] But much of Pre-Islamic Persian literature reflects Zoroastrian concerns and perspectives. Long before Firdawsī composed his epic *Shāhnāmeh* in late 10th century, the lives of important kings of Persia were widely transmitted. Compilations of stories, such as the *Khwadāy Nāmag* ("Book of Lords/Kings"), certainly contained biographical elements.[21] And even more similar to the literary genre that was developing in Graeco-Roman circles was the *Kārnāmag-i*

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[15] See, Maureen A. Tilley, "The Ascetic Body and the (Un)Making of the World of the Martyr," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59, (1991): 467-479; Everett Ferguson, "Early Christian Martyrdom and Civil Disobedience," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1, (1993): 73-83; G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era*, (New York: Routledge, 1995); Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

[16] Michael Stuart Williams, in his work on early Christian biographical writings, follows Bowersock in seeing acts of Christian martyrs as a separate (though clearly related) genre from the later-forming Christian biographies: *Authorized Lives in Early Christian Biography: Between Eusebius and Augustine,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6. The acts of the martyrs, however, carried a remarkable currency among a wide range of Christian communities.

Rabbinic Jewish communities in the first to fourth centuries also availed themselves of martyrdom narratives, occasionally in ways remarkably similar many Christians, though increasingly with an eye towards distinguishing themselves from Christians: see Boyarin, *Dying for God*. Rabbinic anecdotes came in many other forms as well, and included virtue stories, miracle accounts, and narratives of praise toward a particular teacher: Philip S. Alexander, "Rabbinic Biography and the Biography of Jesus: A Survey of Evidence," in *Synoptic Studies: The Ampleforth Conferences of 1982 and 1983*, ed. C. M. Tuckett, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament,* Supplement Series 7, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984): 19-50. These stories found expression within *midrashīm*, the Tosefta, and the Talmud. Interestingly, as Philip Alexander argues, these anecdotes, though fully biographical in nature, do not develop into an identifiable genre of biography where individuals are given a birth-to-death story (40).

[17] Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture,* 1-2.

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[18] Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture,* 20-27.

[19] For general observations regarding the influence of Greek, Persian, and Syriac literatures on the development of Arabic literature, see chapters by L. E. Goodman, C. E. Bosworth, and R. Y. Ebied in *CHALUP.* That many of above mentioned biographies were familiar to classical Muslim scholars writing in Arabic can be seen, for example, from the selections provided by Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 28-51.

[20] Christians in the Sasanid Empire, for example, produced a host of these writings, the most famed of which is perhaps the *Acts of the Persian Martyrs*, probably written in the early 5th century. See, Christelle Jullien, "Martyrs, Christian," EIr. For a historical overview of the pre-Islamic Persian church, including the instances of persecution, see Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 91-263; A. Vööbus, "Acts of the Persian Martyrs," EIr.

[21] Mary Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature," *Handbuch der Orientalistik: Erste Abteilung, Nahe und der Mittlere Osten,* Band 4: Iranistik, Abschnitt 2: Literatur, Lieferung 1, (Leiden : E.J. Brill, 1968), 57-60. Though this work is now lost, portions of it are preserved in the writings of al-Tabari (d. 310/923) and Firdawsī (d. 411/1020): Ehsan Yarshater, "Iranian National History," *CHIr* 3 (1), 359-477. See also: Otakar Klima, "Wie sah die persische Geschichtschreibung in der vorislamischen Periode aus?" *Archiv Orientální* 36, (1968): 213-232; A. Sh. Shahbazi, "On the *Xwadāy-nāmag," Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater*, Acta Iranica 30, (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 208-229.

Ardashīr-i Pāpagān ("The Book of Deeds of Ardashir") which was probably composed near the end of the Sassanid era.[22] Though these accounts of great men of valor were infrequently written down, they likely impacted regional storytelling expectations.[23] And several of them—some that are lost to us today—were known to have been written down and even translated into Arabic during the translation movement.[24]

Now, returning to the topic of Arabic literatures which undoubtedly extended a more direct influence on how the biographies of the imams took shape, several notes are relevant. Attention to the conventional categories of Arabic literature can help determine some of the key motives, goals, and expectations that accompanied much of the Islamicate literary productions of a generally biographical nature. As one might expect, the Prophet Muḥammad was the subject of biographical writings from the earliest stages of Islamic literary output. *Maghāzī* and *sīra* represent these early Arabic genres.[25] These two terms overlap to a significant degree and at times appear to be interchangeable, but there seems to be some slight distinctions that can be made.[26] The earliest biographical writings on Muḥammad were likely referred to by the term *maghāzī* (lit.: "raids"). They encompassed a variety of activities of Muḥammad but, as Martin Hinds has shown, were often not strictly limited to the lifetime of Muḥammad and included material from shortly before his life through the lives of the first four caliphs following him.[27] There is some debate about who were the earliest writers of these,[28] but by the middle of the 8th century, some *maghāzī* writings were beginning to

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[22] Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia: Volume I, From the Earliest Times until Firdawsī,*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 122. Browne also shows the extent to which Firdawsī was faithful to this source in his composition of the *Shāhnāmeh*, which suggests the likelihood that other stories within Firdawsī's work is drawn from similar works which are now lost to us: 136-151. See also: Yarshater, "Iranian National History," CHIr, 365.

[23] Al-Tabari (d. 923) is known to have consulted some of these very works: see Bosworth's forward in *The History of al-Ṭabarī: Volume V, The Sāsānid, the Byzantines, the Lakminds, and Yemen,* tr. C. E. Bosworth (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), xix-xx.

[24] See Ibn Nadīm's listings of both of these examples: *al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 2002), 190, 476-477.

[25] For an overview of *sīra* and maghāzī, see: Ilse Lichtenstadter, "Arabic and Islamic Historiography," *Muslim World* 35, (1945), 126-132; GAS I, 275-302; H. A. R. Gibb, "Islamic Biographical Literature," in *Historians of the Middle East,* eds. B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 54-58; ʿAbd al-Azīz Dūrī, *The Rise of Historical Writing,* edited and translated by Lawrence Conrad (Princeton:

Princeton University Press, 1983), 23-41; J. M. B. Jones, "The *Maghāzī* Literature," CHALUP; M. J. Kister, "The *Sīrah* Literature," *CHALUP;* Maher Jarrar, *Die Prophetenbiographie im Islamischen Spanien: Ein Beitrag zur Überlieferungs- und Redaktionsgeschichte*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), 1-59; M. J. L. Young, "Arabic Biographical Writing," *CHALAP;* R. S. Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry,* revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 92-98; Martin Hinds, "al-Maghāzī," EI^2; W. Raven, "*Sīra,*" EI^2; Martin Hinds, *Studies in Early Islamic History*, (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1996), 188-198; Wadād al-Qāḍī, "Biography, Medieval," *EAL*; Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 1-6, 18-23; Dwight Reynolds, ed., *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 36-40; Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20-24, 61-66; Josef Horovitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and Their Authors,* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2002); Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam,* (London: Routledge, 2006); Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam,* 40-53.

[26] Maher Jarrar argues that *maghāzī* is simply a part of *sīra* (42-43). Jones is also of this opinion, calling *maghāzī* a "sub-category" of *sīra*: *CHALUP,* 344.

[27] Martin Hinds, *Studies*, 188-198. Several scholars have noted the continuity between ayyām al-ʿarab accounts and the development of maghāzī narratives. See Lichtenstadter, "Arabic and Islamic Historiography," 129; Malak Abiad, "Origine et développement des dictionnaires biographiques arabes," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 31, (1979), 9-10; Jones, "The *Maghāzī* Literature," *CHALUP,* 344 ; Raven, "*Sīra,*" EI^2; Claude Cahen, "History and Historians," *CHALAP,* 189.

[28] There is some disagreement whether *maghāzī* literature was originally a product of the *akhbārī* scholars (pl. - *akhbārīyūn,* semi-professional collectors of reports, genealogies, and histories who rose to prominence during the early Umayyad period (late 7th century)) or the early hadith scholars (pl. - *muḥaddithūn,* religious scholars attentive to the narratives of Muḥammad and his companions, particularly as they related to moral/ethical behavior). For an example of this disagreement, compare: Dūrī, *Rise of Historical Writing,* 23; Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 1-6. Most recent scholars now agree

be called *sīra* (lit.: "way of going," or "conduct"). The most important example here is al-Zuhrī's (d. 124/742) *Sīra* and Ibn Hishām's redaction of Ibn Isḥāq's (d. 150/767) *Sīra.* These two early forms of biography would endure and significantly influence other forms of Islamicate historiography. *Sīra* literature sustained particular longevity and prominence among Muslim scholars through history and the term was occasionally also applied to biographies of other famed figures of history.[29]

The Prophet was not the only figure to receive early biographical treatments. Simultaneous with the emergence of *maghāzī* and *sīra,* there were attempts to record *tarājim* (actions and attributes of a person, sing.- *tarjama*)[30] about some of his companions, particularly those who went on to govern the Muslim community as the

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that the hadith scholarship itself, as an organized discipline, was too late of a development to lay claim to the earliest *maghāzī* texts—it should be remembered, however, that the organization of knowledge about the Prophet was precisely the area where these two scholarly enterprises overlapped and some of the early writers of *maghāzī*, such as ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/712) and Muḥammad b. Muslim al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741), were referred to as specialists in *akhbār* and hadith. It would be anachronistic, however, to consider either scholar a *muḥaddith*, especially al-Zubayr whose *maghāzī* writings are the earliest extant examples of the literature and whom Dūrī labels the "founder of *maghāzī* studies": Dūrī, *Rise of Historical Writing,* 25. Al-Zubayr's *maghāzī* contributions, however, are extant only through the extensive quotations of scholars like al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Isḥāq (d. 151/761), and al-Wāqidī. W. al- Qāḍī argues that the original *maghāzī* writers were neither *akhbārīyūn* nor *muḥaddithūn*, but religious scholars (*ʿulamā*ʾ) in general: "Biographical Dictionaries as the Scholars' Alternative History of the Muslim Community," in *Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopædic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World*, edited by Gerhard Endress (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 29-30, n. 23.

[29] On the relatively short life of *maghāzī* literature, see: Jones, "The *Maghāzī* Literature," 346. The *sīra* works on figures other than the prophet tended to be connected with epic narratives and even less critical scholarship was applied in their historiographical methods: P. Heath, "Sīra S̲h̲abiyya," EI²; G. Canova, "Sīra Literature" EAL.

[30] D. F. Eickelman, "Tard̲j̲ama: In Literature," EI².

first four Sunni caliphs from 632 to 661.[31] Eventually *tarājim* would be composed in an array of forms on personages from a variety of professions, but the earliest examples of these Arabo-Islamic biographical endeavors were likely in an effort to defend the leadership of an individual caliph over and against his competitors for power.[32] This early Islamic discourse over superior piety and moral excellence found notable literary expression—among other ways—in the form of *manāqib* literature (also known as *faḍā'il* literature).[33] *Manāqib* (virtues) writings played a prominent role in public political discourse, particularly after the ʿAbbāsid revolution in 750. The format was soon utilized, however, to give accounts of scholars, warriors, and Sufis.[34] It is not easy to isolate a clearly defined genre to be labeled *manāqib*, yet it is a common term that came to encompass a variety of literatures. Many of the *manāqib* writings, however, are highly biographical in nature,[35] though they often came to connote a particular emphasis on miracles or other extraordinary events. Many *manāqib* works could rightly be categorized as hagiography.

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[31] Asma Afsaruddin, "In Praise of the Caliphs: Re-Creating History from the *Manāqib* Literature," *IJMES* 31, 3 (1999), 329-350.

[32] Afsaruddin, *Excellence and Precedence,* 1-35.

[33] For the degree of overlap between *manāqib* and *fadā'il*, see: R. Sellheim, "Faḍīla,"s EI^2; Charles Pellat, "Manāḳib," EI^2. For other general treatments of *manāqib* and *fada'il* literatures, see: Ernst August Gruber, *Verdienst und Rang: Die Faḍā'il als literarisches und gesellschaftliches Problem im Islam*, (Freiburg im Breisgau: K. Schwarz, 1975*)*; C. E. Bosworth, "Manāqib Literature," EAL; Afsaruddin, "In Praise of the Caliphs;" Afsaruddin, *Excellence and Precedence*.

[34] Young mentions a few royal biographies for example: "Arabic Biographical Writing," 177-178.

[35] Reynolds (et al.) have noted that *manāqib* writings were often the continuation of the *sīra* form of biography under a new name: Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 39.

By the early 9th century, a significant literary development had been born through the meticulous, and often voluminous, collecting of *tarājim* of various people into one work.[36] Collective biographies would come to hold one of the most important, and arguably most distinct, literary contributions of classical Arabic.[37] This is particularly the case with biographical dictionaries (typically organized alphabetically by name and often themed around a particular guild or profession), but could be said of *ṭabaqāt* literature as well,[38] the latter being organized by generation or time period and often incorporated into larger works of annalistic historical writings.[39] Like other forms of Arabo-Islamic biography, collective biographies lie in the ambiguous borderlands of the western literary conception of *biographia* and are often rightly labeled prosopography.[40]

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[36] The earliest extant examples of this are Ibn Sa'd's (d. 230/845) *Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* and Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī's (d. 231/845 or 232/846) *Ṭabaqāt al-shu'arā'.*

[37] On collective biographies, see: Tarif Khalidi, "Islamic Biographical Dictionaries: A Preliminary Assessment," *Muslim World* 63, (1973), 53-65; Ibrahim Hafsi, "Recherches sur le genre "*ṭabaqāt*" dans la literature arabe," in three parts, *Arabica* 23, 3 (1976), 227-265 and 24, 1 (1977), 1-41 and 24, 2 (1977), 150-186; Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Controversy and its Effects in the biographical Tradition of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī," *Studia Islamica* 46, (1977), 115-131; Malak Abiad, "Origine et développement des dictionnaires biographiques arabes," *Bulleitn d'Etudes Orientales* 31 (1979 [1980]), 7-15; Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Dreams, the Blind, and the Semiotics of the Biographical Notice," *Studia Islamica* 51, (1980), 137-162; Young, "Arabic Biographical Writing," *CHALAP*, 168-187; Paul Auchterlonie, *Arabic Biographical Dictionaries: A Summary Guide and Bibliography*, (Durham: Middle East Libraries Committee, 1987); Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*, (Boulder; London: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 1994); Wadād al-Qāḍī, "Biographical Dictionaries: Inner Structure and Cultural Significance," in *The Book in the Islamic World*, ed. George N. Atiyeh (The Library of Congress: State University of New York Press, 1995), 93-122; Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 204-210; Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-23; Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 66-74; Wadād al-Qāḍī, "Biographical Dictionaries as the Scholars' Alternative History," 23-75.

[38] The distinction between biographical dictionaries (or *mu'jam* writings) and *ṭabaqāt* is not always made, but here I agree with C. Robinson on the matter: *Islamic Historiography*, 66-74.

[39] Such as Ibn Sa'd's *Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā.*

One last genre of literature relevant here is the *qiṣṣa* (pl- *qiṣaṣ*), an early Arabic form of "story."[41] The *Qiṣṣa* emerged from a professional, court-employed class of preachers in the Umayyad period, called the *quṣāṣ*. Although their accounts were often composed of distilled portions of *tafsīr*, *sīra/maghāzī*, and other historical literatures, the genre did have a role in the development of early Islamic biographical writings.[42] By the early 8th century there were collections of stories about the prophets that circulated under this term.[43] “Tales of the Prophets” (Qiṣaṣ al-anbīyā) came to occupy its own literary category, the most important contributions to which were by Wahb b. Munabbih (d. ca. 110/728), Isḥaq b. Bishr (d. 206/821), al-Tha^{c}labī (d. 427/1035-6), and al-Kisā’ī (d. 10th cent.).[44] This type of literature, which was a mixture of serious stories intended for devotional purposes and light-hearted stories for entertainment, also found itself included within larger historical works, such as al-Ṭabari’s (d. 310/923) *Ta’rīkh* and Ibn Kathīr’s (d. 774/1373) *al-Bidāya wal-nihāya*. Some of these accounts of the prophets in this literature resemble full biographical treatments and were related to Qur’anic exegetical questions. Many Muslim scholars, perhaps most influentially Ibn Taymīya (d. 728/1328), have occasionally attacked the historical reliability of these accounts, yet it has remained as an important literature in popular culture.[45]

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[40] Young appears to be the first to distinguish this literature as prosopography ("Arabic Biographical Writing," 170) and Robinson structures his literary categories in this way as well (*Islamic Historiography,* 55-79). Emphasis on this literature as prosopography rather than biography has been even further underscored by R. Kevin Jacques in his article, "Arabic Islamic Prosopography: the Tabaqat Genre," in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications: A Handbook,* ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2007), 387-414.

Some have argued that the literatures discussed here are not really biographical at all. Consider, for example, Gustave von Grunebaum's discussion of Arabic biographical literature where he criticizes it on account of his particular expectation of character development: *Medieval Islam,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 275-287. Wadād al-Qāḍī has offered some insightful comments on how to read early Arabic biographies: "In the Footsteps of Arabic Biographical Literature: A Journey, Unfinished, in the Company of Knowledge," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 68, 4 (2009), 242-246. See also: Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self,* 241-253.

[41] See, Charles Pellat, "Ḳiṣṣa: 1. The Semantic Range of *ḳiṣṣa* in Arabic," EI²; A. Abdel-Meguid, "A Survey of the Terms Used in Arabic for 'Narrative' and 'Story," *Islamic Quarterly* 1, 4 (1954), 195-204; H. T. Norris, "*Qiṣaṣ* Elements in the Qurʾān," CHALUP, 246-259. The verbal form of the word (qaṣṣa) generally meant to relate a detailed account of someone or some event. The verb is found in the Qur'an in numerous places, often in relationship to the prophets. See, for example: 11:5; 28: 25; and 4:78. For a full list, see Pellat, "Ḳiṣṣa," EI².

[42] See Raven, "Sīra," EI².

By the end of the 9th century, relatively clear literary conventions had solidified in each of the aforementioned types of Arabic biographical writing.[46] Each of them overlapped in some respects but typically exhibited their own consistent patterns of subject matter, mode of presentation, and expected content. Here, it is important to recall some of the social functions served by these literatures. *Maghāzī* and *sīra* works provided the earliest biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad and often answered the devotional interests of Muslims as well as addressed exegetical questions regarding the Qur'anic revelations.[47] *Sīra* was extended as a form to include other revered leaders (spiritual, political, or both) and often came to take the form of *manāqib* writings which laid particular emphasis on the outstanding moral excellence of the subject. While *sīra* and *manāqib* literature spoke to the devotional needs of the community, they just as often played central roles in political—and otherwise sectarian—controversies.[48] Collections of shorter biographical notices, or *tarājim,* were compiled into biographical dictionaries and *ṭabaqāt* works which addressed the needs of individual disciplines (particularly the hadith scholarship) and other groups.[49] Finally, *qiṣaṣ* were written and told as popular forms of entertainment coupled with moral/ethical advice. They were usually regulated to stories of pre-Islamic prophets and other legendary figures.[50] This diverse grouping of early Islamicate writings reflects influential components of the literary context out of which biographies of the imams were conceived and assembled.

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[43] See William M. Brinner’s introduction to al-Tha‘labī, *‘Arā‘is al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā,* tr. and annotated by William M. Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002), xviii-xix. For an overview of this literature, see: Dūrī, *Rise of Historical Writing,* 122-35; William M. Brinner, “Legends of the Prophets (*Qiṣāṣ al-anbiyā’*),” *EAL*.

[44] T. Nagel, “Ḳiṣaṣ al- Anbiyāʾ,” EI^2.

[45] See Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies,* 2 volumes, edited by S.M. Stern, translated by C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967-71), v. 2, chapter 5. On the complex perspectives towards the use of *qiṣaṣ,* see, Merlin Swartz, *Ibn al-Jawzī’s* Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa’l-Mudhakkirīn, (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq Éditeurs, 1971), especially Swartz’s comments on pages 46-60.

[46] Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 24-30.

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[47] Kister, "The Sīrah Literature," 353-355; W. al-Qāḍī, "Biography, Medieval," EAL.

[48] Kister, "The Sīrah Literature," 362-367; Afsaruddin, "In Praise," 340-342; idem, *Excellence and Precedence*, 1-35.

[49] Young, "Arabic Biographical Writing," 169-176. W. al-Qāḍī puts forth a convincing argument that another key function of biographical dictionaries was to give voice to an alternative view of history by scholars who otherwise felt excluded from the institutions of power: "Biographical Dictionaries as the Scholars' Alternate History."

[50] T. Nagel, "Ḳiṣaṣ al- Anbiyāʾ," EI^2; Brinner, introduction to al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis,* xi-xviii.

I.B. Biographies of the Imams

As may be anticipated, the earliest extensive biographical accounts of any of the imams were focused on ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the first imam. This is the case not simply because of ʿAlī's temporal primacy, but is also due to the significance of religious and political issues at stake regarding the events of his life. The fact that a biography can function as political protest or religious polemic is exemplified by the early *tarājim* related on the life of ʿAlī.

None of the subsequent imams would receive the same level of literary attention as ʿAlī, though a few would come close. ʿAlī's second son and archetypal Shiʿi martyr, Imam al-Ḥusayn, attracted the attention of many biographers throughout Islamic history, as did—though to a lesser extent—the prophet's daughter, Fāṭima, the sixth imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, and the eighth imam, ʿAlī al-Riḍa.[51] As for the rest of the twelve imams, *tarājim* can be found for most of them in the major (proto-)Sunni biographical dictionaries and *ṭabaqāt* works. A collection of anecdotes is also sprinkled about in the early treatments on the aforementioned imams, as well as in the early canonical Shiʿi hadith collections of the 10th century. But it was not until the appearance of collective biographies of the imams as a literary form that the less-often-mentioned imams began to have more complete life framings put into writing by the

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[51] This observation is supported can be demonstrated, for example, by a simple perusal of the works listed in Hossein Modarressi's *Tradition and Survival*.

Shiʿi community. Thus the structural requirements of the emerging genre led to particular kinds of content expansions of what was deemed important to remember. The practical effects of the logic which this genre facilitates will be seen in subsequent chapters.

This brings us to the specific collection of writings which constitute the subject of the present research. I have placed some loose criteria on what I consider a collective biography of the imams: first, the work must devote at least half of its length to the lives of the twelve imams, and second, the individual lives of each imam must be the primary organizational principle (thus excluding thematically-organized hadith collections). Such works are not the only form of literature which presents biographical information about the imams but collective biographies represent an identifiable genre with certain assumptions, expectations, and conventions.

There are five key works which fit this criteria and were first written in the 10th to 12th centuries. These works constitute the central focus of my analysis of the formative stage of the literary development of collective biographies of the imams. They are:

1) al-Masʿūdī's (attr.) *Ithbāt al-waṣīya* (10th century)
2) Al-Mufīd's *Kitāb al-irshād* (10th century)
3) Ibn Jarīr's *Dalā'il al-imāma* (10th or 11th century)
4) Al-Ṭabrisī's *Iʿlām al-warā'* (11th century)
5) Ibn Shahrāshūb's *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib* (12th century)

I have chosen these specific works for several reasons. First, when looking at biographies of the imams after the 12th century, these five are the most regularly cited.[52] They also have been well-received among the Shiʿa. Teachers, scholars, and preachers have found them to be useful across the centuries. Second, they are the earliest extant examples of this genre which are of sufficient length to be useful. And third, these five contain most of the content which would be recycled (though always in creative and new ways) through subsequent centuries. After Ibn Shahrāshūb, very few narratives appear in the literature on the imams which are not represented, in one way or another, in these works.

Al-Masʿūdī's (attr.) *Ithbāt al-waṣīya*

The earliest extant example I have found of a collective biography of the imams, as defined above, is the *Ithbāt al-waṣīya li-imām ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib* which has been attributed to one of the most acclaimed historians during the ʿAbbāsid caliphate, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī (d. Jumādá II 345/ September 956).[53] The author is remembered primarily for his book of history, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin jawhar*, a work of impressive breadth and literary skill. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) held the latter in high esteem and it has captured the fascination of many modern scholars of Islam.[54] Although al-Masʿūdī penned at least thirty-six separate works,[55] only one other surviving text—in addition to *Murūj*—can safely be attributed to him: *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa'l-ishrāf,* another work of general history. In contrast, the *Ithbāt al-waṣīya* has recently been considered of doubtful authenticity by such scholars as Tarif Khalidi and Charles Pellat.[56] Among the reasons for questioning al-Masʿūdī's authorship is that the work is not mentioned by any Sunni biographers of al-Masʿūdī, it is not mentioned by al-Masʿūdī in *Murūj* or *Tanbīh*, and there exist variations of detail and style when compared to *Murūj* and *Tanbīh*. Other scholars, such as Aghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī (1876-

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[52] See appendix for a description of other 10th-12th century works, as well as a description of later works of this genre.

[53] The two monographs on al-Masʿūdī are: Tarif Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Masʿūdī*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1975); Ahmad M. H. Shboul, *Al-Masʿūdī and his World: a Muslim Humanist and his Interest in non-Muslims*, (London: Ithaca Press, 1979). Other relevant scholarship on al-Masʿūdī includes: *GAL* I, 150-152, S I, 220-221; S. Maqbul Ahmad, "Al-Masʿūdī's contribution to Medieval Arab Geography," in *Islamic Culture* 27, (1953), 61-77 and 28, (1954), 275-86; S. Maqbul Ahmad, "Travels of Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī," *Islamic Culture* 28, (1954): 509-524; S. Maqbul Ahmad and A. Rahman (eds.), *Al-Masʿūdī Millenary Commemoration Volume,* (Aligarh: Indian Society for the History of Science, 1960); *GAS,* 1: 332-336; Charles Pellat, "Masʿūdī et l'Imāmisme," in *Le Shîʿisme imâmite: Colloque de Strasbourg (6-9 mai 1968),* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), 69-90; Tarif Khalidi,

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"Masʿūdī's Lost Works: A Reconstruction of Their Content," *JAOS* 94, 1 (1974): 35-41; Julie Scott Meisami, "Masʿūdī on Love and the Fall of the Barmakids," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2, (1989): 252-277; Maria Kowalska, "Al-Masʿūdī's Stellung in Geschichte der arabischen Literatur," *Folia Orientalia* 32, (1996): 115-121; Julie Scott Meisami, "Masʿūdī and the Reign of al-Amīn: Narrative and meaning in Medieval Muslim Historiography," in *On Fiction and* Adab *in Medieval Arabic Literature* (ed. Philip F. Kennedy), (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 149-176; Maysam J. Faruqi, "Is There a Shīʿa Philosophy of History? The Case of Masʿūdī," *Journal of Religion* 86, 1 (2006): 23-54; A. Azfar Moin, "Partisan Dreams and Prophetic Visions: Shīʿī Critique in al-Masʿūdī's History of the Abbasids," *JAOS* 127, 4 (2007): 415-427.

[54] Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn: al-Muqaddima,* v. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1961), 52. See also, Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture,* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1957), 152-153, 164, 255; W. J. Fischel, "Ibn Khaldūn and al-Masʿūdī", in *al-Masʿūdī Millenary commemoration volume* (eds. Ahmad and Rahman), 51-59.

[55] For a list and description of his works, see, Khalidi, "Masʿūdī's Lost Works."

[56] Ibid., "Masʿūdī's Lost Works," 40; Pellat, "Al-Masʿūdī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn," EI^2.

1970), have argued that the attribution to al-Masᶜūdī is accurate.[57] His reasons include that al-Masᶜūdī's inclinations towards Twelver Shiᶜism are clear even within *Murūj* and *Tanbīh*, that there are theological similarities between *Ithbāt* and *Murūj,*[58] and that Shiᶜi scholars have understood the *Ithbāt* to be a work of al-Masᶜūdī from at least the mid-11th century onwards.[59] Although I am inclined to agree with Khalidi and Pellat on this question, I will provide a few comments on the life and work of al-Masᶜūdī.[60]

We do know some interesting bits from the life of al-Masᶜūdī from the many references in *Murūj* and *Tanbīh*. He was born in Baghdad in the last decade of the 9th century.[61] Judging from the scholars from whom al-Masᶜūdī reports, he studied with some of the most famed scholars living during the first decade of the 10th century, such as the historian and *muḥaddith* Wakīᶜ (d. 306/918),[62] the Imāmī theologian al-Ḥasan b.

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[57] Muḥammad Muḥsin Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʻah ilá taṣānif al-Shīʻah* (Najaf: Maṭbaʻat al-Qaḍā, 1936-), v. 1, 110.

[58] On this point, Pellat would likely concur : "Masᶜūdī et l'Imāmisme," 69-90. Interestingly, in this article Pellat cautiously accepted al-Masᶜūdī's authorship of *Ithbāt,* where he says, "Provisoirement, et bien qu'il m'en coûte, je considérerai donc que l'*Ithbāt al-waṣīyya* peut être l'oeuvre de Masᶜūdī" (89-90). Later, however, Pellat comes to see the attribution as "doubtful": Al-Masᶜūdī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn," EI^2.

[59] The earliest account ascribing *Ithbāt* to al-Masᶜūdī is in al-Najashi's (d. 450/1058) *Rijāl al-Najāshī,* (ed. Muḥammad Jawād al-Nā'inī) 2 volumes, (Beirut: Dār al-Adwā', 1988), v. 2, 76-77.

[60] This is a question which I would like to eventually address in a separate article.

[61] Charles Pellat argues that he must have been born by 280/893: "Al-Masᶜūdī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn," EI^2. Shboul gives the birth dates as 283/896: *Al-Masᶜūdī and his World*, xv.

[62] Al-Masᶜūdī, *Tanbīh wa'l-ishrāf,* ed. Michael Jan de Goeje (Beirut: Maktabat Khayyāṭ, 1965), 293. For Wakīᶜ, see, A. K. Reinhart, "Wakīᶜ, Muḥammad b. K̲h̲alaf b. Ḥayyān," EI^2.

Mūsá al-Nawbakhtī (d. early 4th/10th c.),[63] and the Muᶜtazilī scholar al-Jubbā’ī (d. 303/915).[64] Pellat believes it is likely that he also was acquainted with the historian and *mufassir* al-Ṭabarī (d. 31/923), the great Arabic grammarian al-Zajjāj (d. 311/924),[65] the theologian al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935)[66] and other notable scholars of the period.[67] Several opportunities were open to al-Masᶜūdī to participate in *ṭalab al-‘ilm* (travelling in search of additional education)[68] and he mentions being in Persia and India as a young adult, in 303/915.[69] Later he traveled to Syria and Arabia,[70] and in 320/932 he visited Armenia and the Caspian area.[71] From about 330/941 onwards, al-Masᶜūdī made his home in Fatimid-controlled Egypt where he resided while writing *Murūj* and *Ithbāt*, both originally penned in 332/943.[72] He continued to travel occasionally to such places as

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[63] Al-Masᶜūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma‘ādin al-jawhar,* 7 volumes, ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut: Publications de l'Universite Libanaise, 1965-1979), v. 1, § 159 and v. 4, 77, § 2282. In French: *Les prairies d'or*, 5 volumes, tr. Charles Pellat (Paris: Société asiatique, 1962-1997), v. 1, § 159 and v. 4, 924, § 2282.

J. L. Kraemer, "al-Nawbakhtī, al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā, Abū Muḥammad," EI^2.

[64] Example: Al- Masᶜūdī, *Tanbīh,* 396. For al-Jubbā’ī, see, L. Gardet, "al-DJubbā;ī, Abū ᶜAlī Muḥammad b. ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb," EI^2.

[65] C. H. M. Versteegh, "al-Zadjdjādj, Abū Isḥāḳ Ibrāhīm b.al-Sarī," EI^2.

[66] M. W. Watt, "al-Ashᶜarī, Abū'l-Ḥasan, ᶜAlī b. Ismāᶜīl," EI^2.

[67] For references, see, Pellat, "Al-Masᶜūdī, Abū ‘l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn," EI^2.

[68] On his travels, see: Maqbul Ahmad, "Travels," 509-21; Shboul, 1-28.

[69] Persia: Al-Masᶜūdī, *Tanbīh,* 106. India: Al-Masᶜūdī, *Tanbīh,* 224.

[70] Al- Masᶜūdī, *Murūj,* § 3326; *Les prairies d'or,* v. 5, 1333-1334, § 3326.

[71] Al- Masᶜūdī, *Murūj,* v. 1, § 494; *Les prairies d'or,* v. 1, § 494.

[72] Al- Masᶜūdī, *Murūj,* v. 2, 126, § 874; *Les prairies d'or,* v. 2, 330, § 874; *Ithbāt,* 231-232.

Antioch,[73] Damascus,[74] and Alexandria,[75] but he spent most of his final years in Egypt. The *Tanbīh* was written in Fustat in 345/956.[76]

The topics explored by al-Masʿūdī in his writings included—in addition to history—geography, law, theology, and political philosophy. In this regard, Pellat appears justified in arguing that al-Masʿūdī ought to be understood as an *adīb* rather than a historian (in the strict sense).[77] Yet despite the autobiographical comments within *Murūj* and the *Tanbīh* a number of uncertainties remain regarding al-Masʿūdī's life. Foremost among them is his profession and source of income. The extent of his travels and the number of books in his possession (*Murūj* cites at least 165 written works)[78] suggest a considerable wealth; yet there are no indications of his participation in commerce, government employment, or any other vocation. It is also uncertain why only two (possibly three) of the thirty-six books he is known to have written have survived, particularly since he was regarded by many Shiʿa as an important member of their community.

Regardless of these uncertainties, and even if *Ithbāt* is not from the pen of al-Masʿūdī, the Shiʿa have consistently regarded the *Ithbāt* as an important source on the lives of the imams. If only for this reason, it must be considered in the present study. The *Ithbāt al-waṣīya* itself is of moderate length, numbering 232 pages in the 1983 edition, almost exactly half of which is devoted to the lives of the imams. The first half of the book mainly focuses on accounts of the prophets—from Adam to Muḥammad—and in this sense resembles the *qiṣaṣ al-anbīyā* genre. The second half of the book, however, details some of the key events and features of the imamate of each of the twelve imams. Though relatively brief in its treatment of each imam, the author is careful to include birth accounts, miracle stories, and death narratives for each imam.[79] Further, an emphasis is placed on detailing the moment of transference of spiritual inheritance (*waṣīya*) from one imam to the next.[80]

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[73] Al- Masʿūdī, *Murūj,* v. 2, 25-26, §§ 704-705; *Les prairies d'or,* v. 2, 264-265, §§ 704-5.

[74] Al- Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh,* 194.

[75] Al- Masʿūdī, *Murūj,* v. 2, 13, 108, §§ 679, 841; *Les prairies d'or,* v. 2, 254-255, 319, §§ 679, 841.

[76] Al- Masʿūdī, *Tanbīh,* 401.

[77] Charles Pellat, "Was al-Masʿūdī a Historian or an *Adīb*?" in *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 9, (1961): 231–234.

[78] Pellat, "Al-Masʿūdī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn," EI^2.

Al-Mufīd's *Kitāb al-irshād*

Among all of the works considered in this study, the most famous is *Kitāb al-irshād,* written by the immensely influential scholar known as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022).[81] No other work is as regularly referenced by subsequent Shiʿi authors of biographies of the imams. This remains as true in contemporary scholarly circles as much as it has been across the centuries. Further, among the works discussed here, *al-Irshād* is the only one to have been given a full English translation.[82] The influence of this work on the genre of collective biographies of the imams can hardly be overstated—it is the prototype. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, however, this does not mean that later Shiʿi authors simply repeated al-Mufīd's perspective or that there was not an ongoing development of ideas, symbols, and motifs within this genre after him. In fact, many scholars would directly contradict al-Mufīd in critical ways.

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[79] This statement could equally be said to apply to Christian "lives" writings.

[80] On the importance of the concept of *wasīya* to the early Shiʿa, see Maria Dakake's *The Charismatic Community.*

[81] Two monographs have been written on al-Mufīd in English: Martin J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd,* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1978); and Tamima Bayhom-Daou's introductory work, *Shaykh Mufīd,* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005). Other helpful scholarship includes: *GAS,* 1:549-551; W. Madelung, "Imāmism and Muʿtazilite Theology," in *Le Shiʿisme imāmite* (ed. T. Fahd), (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1970), 13-29; S. Waheed Akhtar, *The Early Imāmiyyah Shīʿite Thinkers,* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1988), 79-122; W. Madelung, "al-Mufīd," EI^2; Niʿmat Ālāh Ṣafarī Furūshānī, "Shaykh Mufīd va-tārīkh nigārī-yi ou dar *Kitāb al-irshād,*" *A Quarterly for Shiʿite Studies* 5, 2 (2007): 7-36; idem., "*al-Irshād* wa-tārīkh

The author, Abū ʿAbd Āllāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmān al-Ḥārithī—known as Ibn al-Muʿallim and as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd—[83]was born around 338/950 in a town called ʿUkbarā, which laid on the west bank of the Tigris river about halfway between Baghdad and Mosul. His father moved his family to Baghdad while al-Mufīd was still young and at a time when many Shiʿa were enjoying greater freedom to publicly study, teach, and express their views.[84] The Shiʻa-friendly Būyid rulers from Iran had taken control of Baghdad in 945 and the ʿAbbāsid empire fell under their protection. Over the course of the next century, a remarkable amount of Imami

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nigārī zindagānī-yi a'immah," *A Quarterly for Shiʻite Studies* 6, 2 (2008): 37-76; Qāsim Khānjānī, "Mudawwanāt al-Shaykh al-Mufīd wa-qarā'ituhu al-kalāmīya li'l-tārīkh" *Turāthunā* 25, 97/98 (1430 [2009]): 87-198.

[82] Al-Mufīd, *Book of Guidance,* translated by I. K. A. Howard, with preface by S. H. Nasr (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1981).

[83] On the origin of his two honorifics, see, McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd*, 10-12; Akhtar, *The Early Imāmiyyah,* 80.

[84] Akhtar, *The Early Imāmiyyah,* 80-81.

scholarship would be produced and lasting changes in the larger Shiᶜi community would take place. Al-Mufīd would be one of the key agents in both cases. Already by 377/987-8, when he was less than forty years old, Ibn al-Nadīm considered al-Mufīd to be a leader of the Shiᶜa.[85] A number of well-known Sunni and Shiᶜa scholars participated in his education,[86] and al-Mufīd eagerly put this learning to use. He was an immensely prolific writer, authoring nearly two hundred books.[87] He was also a devoted teacher, whose students carried on his legacy of scholarly engagement and community leadership. Two of his most prominent students were the sons of the ᶜAlid *naqīb* of Baghdad,[88] al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1015) and al-Sharīf al-Murṭaḍá (d. 436/1044),[89] each of whom would eventually serve as *naqīb* and contribute to the canon of foundational Shiᶜi scholarship.[90] It appears al-Mufīd had some contact with and influence on the Buyid rulers—ᶜAḍud al-Dawla (d. 372/983) is even said to have attended al-Mufīd's lectures.[91] He also participated in public debates on a range of topics. His activity in each of these areas put him in the spotlight whenever Sunni-Shiʿi tensions flared and earned him a memorable legacy among both communities.

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[85] Ibn Nadīm, *al-Fihrist,* 178, 197; English: *The Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadim*, v. 1, 443, 491

[86] He studied *fiqh* with Jaᶜfar b. Qulūya (d. 369/979-80) and Ibn al-Junayd al-Iskāfī (d. 381/991); theology with Abū al-Jaysh al-Balkhī (d. 367/977-8) and, perhaps, Abū Ṣahl b. Nawbakht; and hadith with Ibn Bābawayh, among others.

[87] For a list and description of his known books, see, McDermott, *The Theology of Shaikh al-Mufid,* 25-45; Akhtar, *The Early Imāmiyyah,* 88-101.

[88] On the institution of *naqīb* among the ᶜAlids, see, L. Massignon, "Cadis et naqibs baghdadiens," in *Opera minora: Textes recueillis, classés et présentés avec une bibliographie,* 3 volumes, edited by Youakim Moubarac (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), v. 1, 258-265; L. Massignon, "Naḳīb al-Ashrāf," EI^2.

[89] On these two brothers, see, Akhtar, *The Early Imāmiyyah,* 123-204.

[90] al-Mufīd had many other prominent students as well. Madelung says, "Virtually all the leading Imami scholars of the following generation were his students" ("Mufīd," EI^2). In addition to those listed above, were, notably, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 459-60/1066-7), al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058), and Muḥammad al-Karājakī (d. 449/1057).

Though a proven scholar of history, law, and hadith, al-Mufīd's most enduring scholarly contribution is generally considered to be his work in theology. Similar to Sunni scholars at the time, Shiʿi intellectuals were divided among those who were inclined towards a highly rationalized understanding of religious knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ʿaqlī*)—particularly as represented by the Muʿtazilī school of thought—and those who preferred to organize religious thought around transmitted knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-naqlī*). Among the latter were many hadith scholars whose center of intellectual activity had recently moved from Kufa to Qum.[92] Two of the great representatives of this persuasion were al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) and Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991-2). Many of these scholars were concerned about the spread of Muʿtazilī thinking among the Shiʿa in Iraq, especially in Baghdad, where the influence of the Banū Nawbakht (a then-prominent Shiʿi family)[93] was facilitating the adoption of rationalist discourse. Al-Mufīd studied under prominent scholars among both of these groups, including Ibn Bābawayh and Abū al-Jaysh al-Balkhī (the latter was a student of Abū Sahl al-Nawbakht). Many have credited al-Mufīd with guiding the Shiʻa community between the extreme positions of either side of this debate and charting a middle-ground which provided the framework for future flourishing of Shiᶜi scholarship and religious thought.[94] It does appear that al-Mufīd had a significant influence on the increasingly widespread adoption of rationalist discourse among the Shiᶜa of subsequent centuries—whether or not it was a "middle" position is debatable.[95]

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[91] Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *al-ʿIbar fī khabar man ghabar,* 5 vols. (Kuwait: Dār al-Maṭbuʻat wa'l-nash, 1960), v. 3, 114. See also, McDermott, *The Theology of Shaikh al-Mufid,* 14.

[92] Andrew Newman helpfully illuminates this critical this intra-Shiʿi debate in *The Formative Period of Twelver Shīʿism.*

[93] On the Nawbakhtī family, see, J. L. Kraemer, "al-Nawbakhtī, al-Ḥasan b. Mūsá," EI^2. On al-Mufīd's connection to them, see McDermott, *The Theology of Shaikh al-Mufid,* 22-25.

Judging from the full range of al-Mufīd's activities, however, intra-Shiᶜi debates were not his primary concern. Al-Mufīd was deeply invested in the defense and articulation of Shiᶜism in response to Sunni criticisms. Some of his most famous public exchanges were with the Sunni scholar al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) over issues of legal theory and the imamate.[96] The submission of the ᶜAbbāsid caliphate to the foreign—and apparently Shiᶜi—rule of the Buyids prompted a surge in Sunni polemics. And the public expression of Shiʻi piety (previously banned) provoked outrage among many. In 352/963, the Būyid amīr, Muᶜizz al-Dawla, granted the Shiᶜa official permission to publicly commemorate two important events in the history of Shiᶜism: ᶜĀshurā' (the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn) and Ghadīr Khumm (when the Prophet is believed to have designated ᶜAlī as his successor). In response, some Sunnis began to organize the own public festivals. In 389/999 there was a public commemoration of the death of al-Zubayr (d. 36/656) just eight days after 'Āshurā' and a celebration of Yawm al-Ghār (when Abū Bakr stayed with the Prophet in the cave) eight days after Ghadīr Khumm.[97] On at least three occasions, between 392/1002 and 409/1018, Baghdad was ravaged by street riots between Sunni and Shi'i groups.[98] In each case, al-Mufīd was banished from the city. But each time, he was eventually allowed to return, though he refused to abandon his public activities. It is in this tumultuous context that he composed *Kitāb al-irshād*.

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[94] McDermott comes to this conclusion (*The Theology of Shaikh al-Mufid,* 395-397); and Bayhom-Daou agrees (*Shaykh Mufid,* 83). I am not convinced that al-Mufīd was taking a middle position as much as he was legitimizing rationalist discourse through slight, but emphatic, differentiation with the Muᶜtazilīya. In any case, the end result was a dramatic shift among the most influential Imami scholars towards thoroughly rationalist—and often, as in the case of al-Murṭaḍá, fully Muᶜtazilī—thought.

[95] On the relationship between Imami theology and Muᶜtazilī theology, see, Madelung, "Imamism and Mu'tazilite Theology." Although al-Mufīd and his students were relatively successful in utilizing rationalist discourse while remaining distinct from Muᶜtazilism, the debate between "traditionists" and "rationalists" would re-emerge in later centuries, particularly in the form of legal debates between the *Usūlī* and *Akhbārī* scholars. See, Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam,* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[96] McDermott, *The Theology of Shaikh al-Mufid,* 15.

Like many of al-Mufīd's works, *al-Irshād* claims to have been written in direct response to a request for guidance in the matter.[99] Although the specific party who made the request is not known, it is clear that al-Mufīd had an educated, but lay, audience in mind. *al-Irshād* is a finely crafted book which utilizes the authoritative narrative structure of the *khabar* and is usually accompanied by complete chains of transmission (*asānīd,* sing.- *isnād*). Al-Mufīd did not limit himself to Shiᶜi sources and appears to have availed himself of Sunni literature whenever possible.[100] The accounts of the imams are orderly and highly readable. The author refrained from protracted theological discussions or cumbersome explanations. The target audience of the work, therefore, appears to be quite broad, limited neither to the Shiᶜa nor to scholarly circles. It is intended to have wide appeal, and in this regard al-Mufīd was quite successful. While *al-Irshād* is polemical in nature, it refrains from unnecessary provocation. The work was widely acclaimed at an early stage and only grew in fame. Several scholars have commented on the significant role this work has played in the activity of Shiᶜi preachers, missionaries, and ritual performances since its composition.[101] Religious leaders have often read directly from this work at public gatherings and commemorations. It came to be al-Mufīd's most widely read work and its success is part of the reason a genre of literature emerged in its image.

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[97] McDermott, *The Theology of Shaikh al-Mufid,* 17.

[98] On these riots, see H. Laoust, "Les Agitations Religieuses à Baghdād aux IVᵉ et Vᵉ siècles de l'Hégire," in *Islamic Civilization, 950-1150: Papers on Islamic History III,* ed. D. S. Richards (London: William Clowes & Sons Limited, 1973), 169-186; George Makdisi, "The Sunni Revival," in *Islamic Civilization, 950-1150,* ed. Richards, 155-168 (Oxford : Cassirer, 1973). For al-Mufīd's role in them, see, McDermott, *The Theology of Shaikh al-Mufid,* 16-22.

[99] *Al-Irshād,* I: 3-4 (Eng: xxxvii).

On the 29th of November (3rd of Ramadan) in 413/1022, al-Mufīd died. His funeral was attended by many people in Baghdad, several accounts suggest around 80,000.[102] As champion of Shiᶜism at a crucial juncture in the development of Shiᶜi identity, al-Mufīd is regarded as one of the most important intellectuals of Islamic history. Sunnis were aware of his immense influence and some were relieved by his passing. Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), in his monumental history of Baghdad, said of al-Mufīd: “He was an imam of error. He intimidated many people until God granted the Muslims relief from him.”[103] Al-Mufīd was a key figure in the transformation of Twelver Shiᶜism from a loosely affiliated group of ᶜAlid sympathizers to a coherent religious community with defined boundaries, specific theological positions, and unique cultural patterns. *Kitāb al-Irshād* played an undeniable role in these developments.

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[100] Among the non-Imami sources that he frequently uses are Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidī, Abū al-Farāj al-Isfahānī, and al-Ṭabarī.

[101] S. H. Nasr, in his preface to Howard's translation (*Book of Guidance,* xix); Muḥammad Riḍá al-Jaᶜfarī, *Introduction to* Kitāb al-Irshād, (Tehran: World Organizations for Islamic Sciences, 2004), 2-5.

[102] Al-Dhahabī, *al-ᶜIbar,* v. 3, 114-115.

Ibn Jarīr’s (attr.) *Dalā’il al-imāma*

Another formative work is *Dalā’il al-imāma*. Although enigmatic in its origins and partially lost to us today, this work was an early contribution to the development of the literature. Dating this work and identifying its original author is a difficult task, however. Most scholars, particularly since the time of Majlisī (d. 1110/1698), have considered *Dalā’il* to be an early 10th century work of the Baghdadi Shiᶜi scholar, Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Āmulī (d. 310/923)—henceforth, (the elder) Ibn Jarīr.[104] Despite the shared name, death dates, and *kunya* (Abū Jaᶜfar), this individual should not be confused with the famed historian and *mufassir,* al-Ṭabarī. Not surprisingly, of course, the two were often confused. Ibn Nadīm, for example, attributed a book on the imamate, titled *al-Mustarshid,* to al-Ṭabarī, but nearly all subsequent Shiᶜi scholars corrected him, noting that *al-Mustarshid* was a work by Ibn Jarīr.[105] References to Ibn Jarīr are few and most Sunni sources fail to mention him at all.[106] In fact, Rosenthal suggests the confusion of these two individuals may have contributed to the misunderstanding regarding the Shiᶜi inclinations of al-Ṭabarī.[107]

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[103] Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām wa-akhbār muḥaddithīhā wa-dhikr quṭṭānihā al-ʿulamā’ min ghayr ahlihā wa-wāridīhā,* 17 vol., ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), v. 4, 375.

[104] I am following E. Kohlberg’s example here by referring to him as Ibn Jarīr in order to limit confusion: *Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭāwūs and His Library (Leiden: Brill, 1992),* 141.

This opaque situation is further complicated by the well-argued claims of Aghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī that *Dalāʾil* was written by yet another Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Āmulī (Abū Jaᶜfar) who died a century later—henceforth, (the younger) Ibn Jarīr.[108] By pointing out that several of the authorities cited among initial portions of some *asānīd* are from scholars living at the turn of the 11th century, it is impossible to assume the elder Ibn Jarīr could have transmitted from them. Furthermore, in at least one case, the text of *Dalāʾil* reports from the scholar al-Ghadāʾirī (d. 411/1020) and follows his name with the words “may God have mercy on him” (*raḥmahu Allāh*), indicating the person had already died.[109] This would place the writing of *Dalā’il* no earlier than 1020, and would mean that the author was a contemporary of al-Ṭūsī and al-Najāshī.

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[105] Notes from Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist kutub al-Shiʿah wa uṣūlahum wa-asm̄ʾ al-muṣan-fīn wa-aṣḥāb al-uṣūl. Edited by ᶜAbd al-Azīz Ṭabāṭabāʾī* (Qum: Maktabat al-Muḥaqiq al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1420 [1999-2000]), 447; al-Najāshī, *Rijāl,* v. 2, 289; and Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Kitāb maʿālim al-ʿulamāʾ fī fihrist kutub al-muṣannifīn minhum qadīman wa-ḥadīthan,* edited by ᶜAbbās Iqbal (Tehran: Maṭba Faradīn, 1353 [1934]), 106 (#716); Muḥsin al-Ḥusaynī al-Āmilī, *Aᶜyān al-Shīʿa.* 56 volumes (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat Ibn Zaydūn, 1353-1379 [1935-1959]), v. 44, 139-40.

[106] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī is one of the few Sunni scholars with a notice on him, but here too very little is known beyond his name and his Shi'i affiliation: *Lisān al-Mīzān,* 6 volumes (Ḥaydarābād al-Dakkan, Maṭbaʿat Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-Niẓāmīyah, 1331-1339 [1911-13]), v. 5, 103.

[107] See F. Rosenthal's introduction to his translation of al-Ṭabarī's *The History of al-Ṭabarī,* an annotated translation, volume 39, edited by Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, c1985-2007), 13.

[108] Al-Ṭihrānī, *Dharīᶜa*, v. 8, 241-247 and v. 21, 9-10. See also the editorial introduction to *Dalāʾil*'s 1992 edition: Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Dalāʾil al-imāma,* (Qum: Muʾassasat al-Biʿatha, 1413 [1992-3]), 1-46.

Unfortunately, nothing is known of the younger Ibn Jarīr. That he even existed is speculated purely based upon the dates of some of the authorities cited in *Dalā’il.* I have been unable to find any references to him in subsequent literature. Most scholars have assumed *Dalā’il* to be the work of the elder Ibn Jarīr.[110] Despite the recent acceptance of al-Ṭihrānī’s thesis by such scholars as Kaḥḥāla and Etan Kohlberg,[111] it remains uncertain whether the younger Ibn Jarīr existed and if *Dalā’il* is entirely an 11th century product. It may be that an earlier draft of this book was written by the elder Ibn Jarīr—perhaps merely as a collection of notes—and that a later scholar edited and interpolated extra stories without attempting to take credit for the work.[112] In any case, enough changes/additions were made to the book in the early 11th century that is must effectively be considered a work of that period, even if significant portions of it may have been put into writing a century earlier.

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[109] *Dalā’il*, 545.

[110] Examples: Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Maᶜālim al-ᶜulamā’*, 106 (#716); Mirzā ‘Abd allāh Afandī al-Iṣbahānī Bahrānī, , *Rīyāḍ al-‘ulamā’ wa-ḥīyāḍ al-fuḍalā’*, 6 volumes (Qum: Maṭba‘at al-khayyām, 1401 [1980]), v. 5, 103; introduction to the 1963 edition of *Dalā’il* (Najaf: Manshūrāt al-Maṭba‘ah al-Ḥaydarīyah); *GAS* I, 540.

[111] ᶜUmar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Muᶜjam al-mu’allifīn: tarājim muṣannifī al-kutub al-ᶜArabīyah*, 4 volumes (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1993), v. 3, 190 (#12593); Kohlberg, *Ibn Ṭāwūs*, 140-141.

[112] It should be noted that if the elder Ibn Jarīr was to have written the book, it would have been during the lesser occultation and thus at a time when there was still a great deal of uncertainty regarding the future of the imamate. Interestingly, the author of the *Ithbāt* explicitly invited scholars to add to his work in the future, finishing his book by saying, “we have left blank space for whoever comes after us” (232). Such could conceivably have been the case with *Dalā’il* as well. Further uncertainties with al-Ṭihrānī’s thesis include the fact that a number of the *asānīd* provided in *Dalā’il* begin with 9th century scholars, better befitting the time period of the elder Ibn Jarīr. As al-Ṭihrānī notes, of course, they could simply be truncated *asānīd*.

The uncertainty of authorship should not distract from the significance of this work. Like *Ithbāt al-waṣīya*, most Shiʿi scholars believed the work to be from a known and reliable source—whether from the early 10th or the early 11th century—and it is occasionally cited among later biographers of the imams. At some point after the 13th century, significant portions from the book were lost. By the time of Majlisī, the sections on Muḥammad and ʿAlī were missing. We know that they existed in the original, however, from extensive quotes in the work of Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266).[113] Structurally, the book resembles al-Mufīd's *Kitāb al-Irshād* in that each of the twelve imams is presented chronologically and each story is presented in the *khabar* format. But there are also significant structural differences from *al-Irshād* and *Dalā'il* is not necessarily dependent upon the latter. Most notably, in this regard, independent sections are designated for Muḥammad and for Fāṭima al-Zahrā, thus anticipating the canonization of the "fourteen infallibles" within this genre. Further, it appears the section on ʿAlī was not significantly longer than the sections for the other infallibles.[114] The two works also differ in the sources that they use. Al-Mufīd relied upon widely recognized textual sources whenever possible, whereas Ibn Jarīr records many alternate narratives taught among Shiᶜi scholars which had hitherto been unrecorded. Finally, the significant differences in content, themes, and purpose will be explored in the subsequent chapters of this study.

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[113] On Ibn Ṭāwūs, see Kohlberg, *Medieval Muslim Scholar,* 3-24.

[114] Although this cannot be stated for certain, since the section on ʿAli is lost to us, Ibn Ṭāwūs mentions that each infallible was contained in one volume of this work: Kohlberg, *Ibn Ṭāwūs*, 140-141. The volume on ʿAlī was likely the longest volume, but this contrasts with al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād* where half of the entire work is devoted to the life of ʿAlī.

Al-Ṭabrisī's *Iᶜlām*

The intellectual legacy of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd can be seen in the 12th century work by al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), titled *Iᶜlām al-warā bi-aᶜlām al-hudā.*[115] The author—whose name is often mistakenly pronounced as al-Ṭabarsī—[116] was a student of al-Mufīd al-Thānī ("the second al-Mufīd") who, in turn, was the son and student of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī,[117] one of al-Mufīd's most influential students. The scholarly lineage was direct. And among the many sources used in al-Ṭabrisī's *Iᶜlām,* al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād* is prominent. Though primarily remembered today for his work in *tafsīr*, al-Ṭabrisī taught in many subjects and played an important role in the development of Shiᶜi thought during the Seljuk period—Donaldson calls him, "the only Shi'ite theologian of importance in the twelfth century."[118]

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[115] For contemporary scholarship on al-Ṭabrisī, see, *GAL* I, 513-14, S I, 708-9; Ḥusayn Karīmān, *Ṭabrisī va Majmaʿ al-bayān,* 2 volumes (Tehran: Dānishgāh-ʾi Tihrān, 1340-1 [1961-2]); Musa O. A. Abdul, "The Unnoticed *Mufassir* ShaykhṬabarsī," *IQ* 15, (1971): 96-105; idem, "The *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān* of Ṭabarsī," *IQ* 15, (1971): 106-20; idem, *The Qurʾan: Shaykh Tabarsi's Commentary*, (Lahore: Hafeez Press, 1977); al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʾa,* v. 2, 240-242, (#957) and v. 3, 213, (#789); Kaḥḥāla, v. 2, 622 (#10821); E. Kohlberg, "al-Ṭabrisī (Ṭabarsī), Amīnal-Dīn," EI^2; Bruce Fudge, *Qurʾānic Hermeneutics: al-Ṭabrisī and the Craft of Commentary* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[116] Karīmān gives an extensive and accurate discussion of this problem (v. 1, 167-205, 313-333), which M. Abdul unfortunately misunderstood, confusing "Arāk" with "ᶜIrāq" (*The Qur'an: Shaykh Tabarsi's Commentary,* 6-7).

[117] This was not al-Ṭabrisī's only connection to al-Mufīd. He studied under at least one other pupil of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī as well: Kohlberg, "al-Ṭabrisī (Ṭabarsī), Amīn al-Dīn," EI^2.

Little attention has been given to al-Ṭabrisī in western scholarship. Only Musa Abdul—who, for this reason, refers to al-Ṭabrisī as "the unnoticed *mufassir*"—had written anything substantial on him in English until Fudge's recent contribution.[119] Al-Ṭabrisī was born around 470/1077 into a significantly different political context than the previously mentioned authors.[120] Most of his early years and activities were in Khurasān, specifically in Mashhad. Much of the region, from Baghdad to the Transoxiana, was under control of the Seljuk sultans. This amorphous dynasty of Turkish rulers signaled the temporary end of Shiᶜi influence among ruling elites and committed itself to the vigorous defense of Sunni Islam. The political and educational policies instituted by the powerful vizier Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092) were fully in place by the time al-Ṭabrisī was beginning his academic career. Yet it was also a time of anxiety among many of the Sunni elite who also saw signs of a possible Shiᶜi resurgence—the capture of Alamut by the Nizāris in 1090 dramatically stoked these fears. Al-Ṭabrisī lived and taught in Mashhad until 1129 when he retired to the more remote town of Sabzavār.[121] He wrote three works of *tafsīr* while in Sabzavar and he probably lived there until his death.

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[118] Donaldson, *Shiᶜite Religion,* 292. This statement speaks to the importance of al-Ṭabrisī, though it hardly does justice to several other major 12th century Shiᶜi scholars.

[119] First in his article, then incorporated into his book.

[120] For alternate birth dates, see, Karīmān, *Ṭabriṣī,* v. 1, 205-208.

While in Mashhad, al-Ṭabrisī balanced the precarious role of a Shiᶜi public intellectual in a Sunni-majority environment. He studied with prominent Sunni and Shiᶜi scholars at that time and engaged himself with the defense of Shiᶜism.[122] Aside from his literary contributions, his role as a teacher was paramount, and his students include the most regarded names of the next generation of Shiᶜi scholars,[123] such as Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī (d. 573/1177-8),[124] Muntajab al-Dīn (d. ca. 585/1189),[125] Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192),[126] and Shādhān b. Jibrā'il al-Qummī (d. ca. 659/1261).[127] *Iᶜlām* appears to have been composed during these years in Mashhad when he was active in teaching and religious debates, before he drew away from public activity and pursued a more ascetic lifestyle in Sabzavār. In all, al-Ṭabrisī penned over twenty works and was occasionally attributed saintly qualities, such as miracles.[128] The circumstances of his death in 1153 are uncertain, though Bayhaqī states that he was a martyr.[129]

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[121] Karīmān, *Ṭabrisī,* v. 1, 209.

[122] Abdul, *The Qurʾan: Shaykh Tabarsi's Commentary,* 11-12. For a list of his teachers, see, Karīmān, *Ṭabrisī,* v. 1, 290-300.

[123] Kohlberg, "al-Ṭabrisī (Ṭabarsī), Amīnal-Dīn," EI^2. For a full list, see, Karīmān, *Ṭabrisī,* v. 1, 300-313.

[124] Quṭb al-Dīn Saᶜīd b. Hibat Allāh al-Rāwandī (d. 573/1177-8); Kohlberg, "Rāvandi, Qoṭb-al-Din Saᶜid," EIr; name of books: *al-Kharāʾij wal-jarāʾiḥ; Fiqh al-Qurʾān; Lubb al-lubāb; Makārim akhlāq* al-*Nabī wa-al-a'immah; Minhāj al-barā'ah fī sharḥ Nahj al-balāghah;* and *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'.*

[125] Author of an important Shiᶜi *fihrist: Fihrist asmā' 'ulamā' al-Shī'ah wa-muṣannifīhim.*

[126] See below.

[127] Author of a work on Imam ᶜAlī: *Risālah fī al-rasā'il jāmi'ah li-daqāyiq al-Manāqib wa-al-Faḍāyil.*

The exact motivations for the composition of *Iᶜlām* are unclear. Interestingly, the work is explicitly written for the Bāwandī king in Māzandarān at the time,[130] Abū al-Ḥasan ᶜAlī b. Shahrīyār b. Qārun (d. 534/1140).[131] There are various possibilities regarding al-Ṭabrisī's intentions given that Bāwandī rulers often had Shiᶜi inclinations, were often at odds with the Seljuks, and had recently come into conflict with the Nizāri Isma'ilis. But there is not sufficient information to reliably propose an answer to this riddle. In any case, the work followed in the line of al-Mufīd's *Irshād* in various manners. For example, al-Ṭabrisī preferred to use widely authoritative—and primarily proto-Sunni—sources wherever possible. The works of al-Wāqidī, Ibn Isḥāq, and al-Zuhrī are regularly cited in the sections on Muḥammad and 'Alī. But al-Ṭabrisī does make his own contributions to the genre and he organized his book into four main sections (*arkān*): 1- on Muḥammad (which includes a section on Fāṭima), 2- on ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, 3- on the second through eleventh imams, and 4- on Twelver Shi'ism and the twelfth imam.[132] The lessons taught of *Iᶜlām* to his students were likely a key inspiration for the works of al-Rawāndī and Ibn Shahrāshūb, the latter of which wrote one of the greatest works of this genre ever composed.

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[128] For a list of these works, see, Karīmān, *Ṭabrisī,* v. 1, 260-290.

[129] Kohlberg says that some later scholars elaborated on this and supposed him to have been poisoned: "al-Ṭabrisī (Ṭabarsī), Amīnal-Dīn," EI^2.

[130] On the Bāwandis, see, Frye, "Bāwand," EI^2; C. E. Bosworth, "The Political and dynastic History of the Iranian World (A. D. 1000-1217)," in *CHIr* 5, (1968), 27-29; W. Madelung, "Āl-e Bāvand," EIr;

[131] *Iᶜlām*, 14. On this king, see, C. E. Bosworth, "'Alā'-al-Dawla 'Alī," EIr.

[132] *Iᶜlām,* 16.

Ibn Shahrāshūb's *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*

Next to al-Mufīd's *Irshād,* there may be no more important and influential biography of the twelve imams than the one authored by the great 12th century Shiᶜi scholar known as Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192).[133] Ibn Shahrāshūb's *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib* appears to be the most frequently quoted work of its type and it exemplifies the uniqueness of the literary genre at hand.[134] It was the crowning achievement of this literature in its time and was the most extensive and thorough contribution to date. It seems fitting in this regard, therefore, to consider this work as a marker of the completion of the formative stage of this literature.

Although we have limited information on the life of Ibn Shahrāshūb, the bits we do know are quite interesting.[135] Abū Jaᶜfar Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī b. Shahrāshūb—known sometimes as ᶜIzz al-Dīn or Rashīd al-Dīn—was born in Sārī (in Māzandarān) around

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[133] For contemporary scholarship on Ibn Shahrāshūb, see, al-ʿĀmilī, v. 46, 136-137, #2556; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 22, 318-319, #7264; *GAL* S I, 710; Kaḥḥāla, v. 3, 515-516, #14748; B. Scarcia Amoretti, "Ibn Shahrāshūb," EI^2; Aḥmad Pākatchī, "Ibn Shahrāshūb," *DMBI* v. 4, 90-92; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Ebn Ŝahrāŝub," EIr; Muḥammad Raḥīm Bayg Muḥammadī, *Ibn Shahrāshūb: dar ḥarīm-i vilāyat,* (n.p.: Markaz-i Chāp va Nashr-i Sāzmān-i Ṭablīghāt-i Islāmī, 1374 (Shamsī) [1996]); Matthew Pierce, "Ibn Shahrashub and Shiʿa Rhetorical Strategies in the 6th/12th Century," *Journal of Shiʿa Islamic Studies* 5, 4 (Autumn 2012), 441-454.

[134] Muḥammdī, *Ibn Shahrāshūb,* 71-72.

[135] The dating for the events of Ibn Shahrāshūb's life are taken primarily from Pākatchī, "Ibn Shahrāshūb," *DMBI,* v. 4, 90-92.

489/1096 and was groomed for scholarship at an early age. He was the devoted student of his grandfather, al-Shaykh Shahrāshūb b. Kīyakī (d. early 6th/11th cent.), who, in turn, had been a student of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī.[136] Like many of the great masters of his age, he traveled extensively in order to study with the most prestigious scholars of his day. First he traveled to Nishāpūr, where he studied and taught for nearly forty years (approx. 505/1112 to 545/1150), and during which time he spent ten years with the great Sunni theologian and *mufassir* al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144). Nishāpūr was a capital of the Seljuk Empire during much of this time and a center of intellectual activity. During these years, he also spent time in surrounding towns in search of more teachers. He was a student of al-Ṭabrisī, for instance, in Sabzavār sometime shortly after 536/1141.

By about 546/1151, Ibn Shahrāshūb seems to have been traveling westward and studied with scholars in Rayy, Kashān, Isfahān, and Ḥamadān before going on to Baghdad. For over ten years, Ibn Shahrāshūb worked in Baghdad mostly teaching and preaching. His work quickly caught the attention of caliph's court and he was invited to preach from the *minbar* during the reign of al-Muqtafī (r. 530-55/1136-60).[137] The general flourishing of Hanbalism over the next few decades, however, inhibited Ibn

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[136] Muḥammadī, *Ibn Shahrāshūb,* 30.

[137] Pākatchī, "Ibn Shahrāshūb," *DMBI*, v. 4, 90. Also referred to in al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-al-aʿlām,* edited by ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1989-), 309-310, #315.

Shahrāshūb's activities and in 566/1170 he felt obliged to leave the city.[138] He lived in Ḥilla for a short time and then in Mosul before finally settling in Aleppo (Ḥalab) around 573/1177. He continued his work in Aleppo, despite his advanced age, before dying there at close to one hundred years old.

On account of his deep desire to learn, his intellectual abilities, and his opportunities to travel, Ibn Shahrāshūb was able to study with an extraordinary number of scholars throughout his career.[139] He was heir to the greatest Shiʿi teachers of his day and was able to incorporate a wide range of material into his own works. Particularly notable, in this regard, are his studies under al-Fattāl (d. 508/1114-5, author of *Rawḍa al-wāʿizīn,* see appendix), Abū ʿAlī al-Ṭabrisī, Qutb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī (d. 573/1177-8, author of *al-Kharā'ij waʾl-jarāʾiḥ,* see below), and Abū Mansūr al-Ṭabrisī (d. *ca.* 620/1223, author of *al-Iḥtijāj* and *Taʾrīkh al-aʾimma* (lost), see appendix). Furthermore, he studied with several notable Sunni scholars of his time as well—such as al-Zamakhsharī and Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 520/1126)—and incorporated many Sunni sources into his writings. His professional activities, however, were by no means limited to academics. Ibn Shahrāshūb was devoted to his role as preacher and critical of the Shiʿa for shrinking from this public mission.[140] Despite his role in the defense of

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[138] For a description of the turn of events in Baghdad at this time, particularly Ibn al-Jawzi's enforcement of Sunni orthodoxy, see Merlin Swartz, *Ibn al-Jawzī's* Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ, 27-34.

[139] For a full list of these, see 'Abd al-Mahdī al-Ithnā'asharī, "Mashyakha Ibn Shahrāshūb (1)." *Turāthunā* 24, 93/94 (1429 [2008]); 11-95; idem, "Mashyakha Ibn Shahrāshūb (2)." *Turāthūna* 24, 95/97 (1429 [2008]); 7-95. See also, Muḥammadī, *Ibn Shahrāshūb,* 31-44.

[140] *Manāqib,* I: 18-19. See also, Muḥammadī, *Ibn Shahrāshūb,* 54-58.

Shiᶜism, and the difficulties he encountered with some Hanbalis in Baghdad, his vast erudition, humble demeanor, and rhetorical skills earned him respect from many who encountered him. Ibn Abī Ṭayyi (d. *ca.* 625-30/1228-33),[141] who encountered Ibn Shahrāshūb in Aleppo apparently wrote a substantial notice on him in his *Tārīkh*, which, although lost to us today, was quoted often among Sunni scholars and contributed to a semi-favorable legacy for Ibn Shahrāshūb among Sunnis.[142]

Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib was likely written during his years in Baghdad and his lessons on the topic may have contributed to his conflict with the Hanbalis there. Ibn Shahrāshūb took the approach explored by al-Mufīd and al-Ṭabrisī—the incorporation of major Sunni sources—and expanded upon it. The number of Sunni sources drawn upon in *Manāqib* is massive, and he lists them in the preface to his work.[143] His inclusion of works by such scholars as Ibn al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868-9), a controversial Muᶜtazilī *adīb*, exemplifies the range Ibn Shahrāshūb's sources. The incorporation of such a wide variety of material was by no means haphazard or lacking in methodology. The author articulates his approach in the preface to *Manāqib*, where he defends his decision to put Sunni (*ᶜāmma*) and Shiᶜi (*khāṣṣa*) narratives side by side. By utilizing many sources seen as antithetical to the Shiᶜi understanding of history, Ibn Shahrāshūb re-contextualizes certain narratives and puts them in conversation with Shiᶜi narratives. In so doing, the author attempts "to bring forth what they [the Sunnis] have suppressed," and "...to draw attention to what the chosen [the Shiᶜa] have reported."[144] The nature of the reports themselves, he argues, will resolve any differences between them. As I have argued elsewhere, this was an effective rhetorical strategy which Ibn Shahrāshūb helped popularize among Shiᶜi scholars.[145]

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[141] On Ibn Abī Ṭayy, see Muḥammad Āṣif Fakrat, "Ibn Abī Ṭayy," *DMBI;* Cl. Cahen, "Ibn Abī Ṭayyiʾ," EI².

[142] On this, see Pierce, "Ibn Shahrashub," 444-451. For an example of a favorable Sunni legacy, see, Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-Mīzān*, v. 5, 310, #1034; Dhahabī, *Ta'rīkh*, 309-310, #315.

[143] *Manāqib,* I: 18-19.

Besides the use of sources, *Manāqib* is also unique for its incorporation of devotional poetry and elegies, some of which were Ibn Shahrāshūb's own composition. As a preacher, Ibn Shahrāshūb had a keen eye for the devotional aspect of his work on the imams. While on one level, he puts Sunni and Shiᶜi sources in conversation with one another—ostensibly on a level playing field—the narratives are framed within the devotional purview of the Shiᶜi believer. This agenda will be clear through many of the quotes taken from *Manāqib* within this study.

I.C. Collective Biographies of the Imams as Sacred History

By way of transition into the rest of this project, it may be useful to consider the heralded study of Arabic poetry by Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*. In this work, Stetkevych provides an excellent example of how concrete places/events of history can expand in significance with their movement into the idealized memory of a literature. His discussion of how the Najd (a central region of the Arabian peninsula) transitions within literature from a place poets fondly mentioned (in 7th and 8th century poetry) into an idealized utopian past (seen throughout subsequent centuries) underscores the discursive power of social memory. Furthermore, Stetkevych makes clear how greater distance from the actual time and place of reference facilitated the further development of the Najd as a prominent cultural motif with increased symbolic significance.[146]

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[144] *Manāqib,* I: 18-19. See also, I: 34-35.

[145] Pierce, "Ibn Shahrashub," 446-451.

Similarly, the collective biographies of the imams could not emerge coherently until a distance between the community of memory and the object(s) of memory had been established. In the 10th century, as the Twelver Shiᶜa began to resolve themselves to the semi-permanent (physical) absence of the imams, notably in the form of the "greater occultation" (*al-ghayba al-kabīr*), the collective biographies began to be written. The continual movement of the imams into the ever-more-distant past facilitated the full exploration of their legacy in ways which would provide meaning for the living community. The process of constructing a sacred narrative through a specific memory of the imams is the subject of this study.

I begin this study from the assumption that the writings on the lives of the imams can provide insight into the way Shiᶜism was evolving as a religious community in the 10th to 12th centuries. Alan Shelston has written: "Any biography is inextricably linked with the priorities and assumptions of the age which produced it."[147] Likewise, the concerns of the Shiʿi communities which produced and transmitted these works can be seen within the writings. Patricia Cox Miller has called this the "author as prism" approach and notes the ways biographies can be read as reflections of the biographers' socio-political setting and cultural landscape.[148] As such, rather than reading the accounts of the imams with the desire to find out if the described events *really* happened, the goal is to learn something about why it was remembered in this way and what were the conditions which made it a meaningful story.[149]

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[146] Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), especially 114-134.

The influence which this literature has played on popular expressions of Shiʿi piety has been noted in passing by several scholars,[150] but it has yet to receive its due attention. Collective biographies of the imams developed into an extensive literature:

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[147] Alan Shelston, *Biography,* in *The Critical Idiom* 34, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co, 1977), 15. Quoted by Young, "Arabic Biographical Writing," *CHALAP,* 178, n. 28).

[148] Cox [Miller], *Biography,* 135, 145-148. This does not mean the stories themselves are fictitious, nor is this unique to Shiʿi literature—Calamawy, for instance, has described the artistic and creative literary elements within Sunni hadith collections as well. See Sahair EL Calamawy, "Narrative Elements in the *Ḥadīth* Literature", *CHALUP*, 308-16, especially 311.

[149] Consider also the observations by Jonathan Brockopp in his discussion of the shortcomings of focusing on the historicity of reports within the biographies of exemplary figures—stating that the meaning of reported events "overwhelms any sense of historicity": "Contradictory Evidence and the Exemplary Scholar: The Lives of Sahnun b. Saʿid (d. 854)," IJMES 43, no. 1 (2011): 124.

[150] R. P. Buckley, "The Early Shiite Ghulāh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 42, no. 2 (1997): 324-325; Muḥammad Riḍá al-Jaʿfarī, *Introduction to* Kitāb al-Irshād, (Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Sciences, 2004), 2-3; Aghaie, *Women of Karbala,* 10.

ʿAbd al-Jabbār Rifāʿī (b. 1954),[151] in his *Muʿjam mā kutiba ʿan al-Rasūl wa-ahl al-bayt*, lists over 2,000 works which appear to fit the genre.[152] By analyzing the patterns and transitions of social memory within these texts, I bring to the foreground the role this literature played in shaping the terms which helped define the distinctions between Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims.[153] In this way, we are able to appreciate the canonizing process of a particular sacred history and the refinement of what Jan Assmann has called "figures of memory."[154] These fixtures of cultural organization have a degree of endurance across time, but are also continually re-interpreted in relationship to changes of the community for which they remain meaningful.

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[151] On al-Rifāʾī, see Hassan Hanafi, "Reformist and Moderate Voices of Islam in the Arab East," in *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity*, edited by Shireen Hunter (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2009), 126-127.

[152] ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Rifāʿī, *Muʿjam mā kutiba ʿan al-Rasūl wa-ahl al-bayt, ṣalawāt ʿalayhim Allāh,* 12 vols. (Tehran: Sāzmān-i Chāp va Intishārāt-i Vizārat-i Farhang va Irshād-i Islāmī, 1371- [1992-]), see volumes 9-10. Thanks to Hossein Modarressi for pointing me to this work.

[153] For an excellent description of the relationship between collective memory and social/religious identity—although in a different context—see, Lucette Valensi, "From Sacred History to Historical Memory and Back: The Jewish Past," *History and Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1986): 283-305.

[154] Assmann, "Collective Memory and Identity," 129.

Chapter Two: Entering the Cosmos

“Before [your birth], you dwelt well among shadows [of paradise],
Deposited where leaves were stitched [i.e. the loins of Adam];
Then you descended to earth, not as a human being,
Nor as a morsel or congealed blood,
But as a drop of sperm [in Adam’s loins]. You sailed the ark
While the flood had reached the mouth of Nasr and his followers.
You were transmitted from loins to wombs;
When people of one generation passed, [another] generation came.
You entered the fire of Abraham, hidden,
How could he be burnt with you in his loins?
...When you were born, the earth shone
And the horizons beamed with your light;
We proceed fast in this brightness
And light, and in the right paths.”[1]

All of the main works considered in this study contain birth narratives.[2] The tone and level of detail in the accounts differ, but the biographers are consistent in perceiving the time, place, and manner of the imams’ births as matters of critical importance. This is a simple observation, but one worth emphasizing in light of the fact that most Arabic biographies and Muslim hagiographies composed around the same time contain few, if any, details of the birth or childhood of their subjects. Consider, for example, Farīd al-Dīn ʻAṭṭār's (d. 618/1221) *Taẕkirat al-awlīyāʾ* (*Remembrance of the Saints*)[3] which opens with a biography of the sixth Shiᶜi imam, Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq. Perhaps with a nod to some of the works used in the present study, ᶜAṭṭār begins his account of al-Ṣādiq by saying,

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[1] *Al-Manāqib,* I: 53. This poem about Muḥammad is attributed to al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. This translation is taken, with a few minor changes, from Uri Rubin, “Pre-existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 5, (1975): 90.

[2] Additionally, Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī attributes a work to al-Mufīd which appears to be devoted to the birth narratives of the imams and the pre-Islamic *awṣiyāʾ* entitled, *Mawlid al-nabī wal-aṣfiyāʾ wal-awṣiyāʾ*. The work is also mentioned by Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007), 7, 222. This work is lost to us, however, and McDermott does not mention it among his list of al-Mufīd’s books: *Theology,* 25-45. Katz also notes several early works written on the births of Muḥammad, Fāṭima, or one of the first three imams (6-7). Later, several works appear which were written on the births and deaths of the imams—for example, Ibn Khashāb al-Baghdādī (d. 567-8/1171-3), *Tārīkh mawālīd al-a’immah wa wafīyātihim,* in *Majmūʿah nafīsah fī tārīkh al-aʾimmah : min āthār al-qudamāʾ min ʿulamāʾ al-imāmīyah al-thuqāh,* ed. Maḥmūd al-Ḥusaynī al-Marʿashī (Beirut: Dār al-Qāriʾ, 2002), 119-150.

> We have said that if we were to memorialize the prophets, Mohammad's companions, and his family, it would require a separate book. This book will consist of the biographies of the masters of this clan, who lived after them. But as a blessing, let us begin with Sādeq (may God be pleased with him) for he too lived after them. Since he among the Prophet's descendants said the most about the path and many traditions have come down from him, I shall say a few words about this esteemed man, for they are all as one.[4]

Such is the beginning of ᶜAṭṭār's entry on al- Ṣādiq, after which he proceeds to describe the virtues and attributes of the adult Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq. There is no nativity, no birth account, no childhood. The guiding concern for ᶜAṭṭār is the spiritual lessons that can be extracted from the stories about al-Ṣādiq—the historical context of those stories is of little note. In contrast, the consistent inclusion of birth information in the collective biographies of the imams stands out. The time and place of the imams' births are always recorded, and descriptions of how the births took place, as well as narrations related to the imams' early childhoods, are often included as well. The early Shiʿi reflections on the births of the imams, particularly Imam ʿAlī, likely contributed to the development of popular stories concerning the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad (see below).

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[3] Farīd al-Dīn ᶜAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-awlīyāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Istīʻlāmī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Zuvvār, 1366 [1987-1988]). An English translation of most of the work has been provided by Paul Losensky, *Farid ad-Din ʻAttār's Memorial of God's Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*, in the series *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009).

[4] ᶜAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-awlīyāʾ*, 12. Translation by Losensky, *Memorial of God's Friends*, 46. We can also take note here of ᶜAṭṭār's impression that the qualities of the imams are essentially interchangeable. He follows the above quote by saying, "When he is remembered, it is the remembrance of them all.... In other words, the one is twelve, and the twelve are one": 12 (English: 46).

The importance of these birth accounts is multi-layered. First of all, the stories indicate to the reader/audience that the biographies are intended as historical. The imams were real men to whom real mothers gave birth at specific moments in human history. In concrete witness to this fact, the biographers typically record the dates of births, deaths, and other major life events, and they note the reigns of kings/caliphs to which these dates correspond.[5] In this way, and unlike many Sufi-oriented bio-hagiographies of the time, the writers demonstrate their concern for documenting real historical events. In doing so they are not losing sight of the spiritual significance of the imams, but rather grounding that significance in the imams' corporeal existence in a corporeal world. The meaningfulness of the imams' lives is continually asserted through their dramatic birth accounts as well as childhood engagements with their contemporaries. The biographers demonstrate that these particular men are superior to any others of their times who illegitimately claimed authority over the Muslim community.

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[5] Some of the biographers, such as Ibn Shahrāshūb (and to a lesser extent, al-Mufīd and al-Ṭabrisī) are quite detailed in their notes about how old each imam was when their father died, at the death of each ruling king/caliph, at the birth of the next imam and at their deaths. For just one, randomly chosen, example, see *Manāqib,* IV: 227-228 (on al-Bāqir).

Throughout this chapter, and those following, I attempt to focus not only on what the texts say, but also what they *do,* what function they serve for the community.[6] In this case, the concern for indicating the time/place of each birth reflects the perspective, and meets the expectations, of a community that views the imams as embodiments of spiritual blessing and divine favor. The significance of this embodiment—i.e. - of the imams' bodies—will be discussed in the next chapter, but here it deserves mentioning that specifying the date of an imam's birth empowers the community of believers to seek God's blessing and favor at that time each year through remembrance of the event.[7] In the same manner, indicating a birthplace provided believers with a physical locus of God's merciful encounter with humanity that could be visited by those seeking such an encounter.

While clearly making historical claims about the imams, the biographers utilize religious symbols and literary motifs found in many hagiographical birth narratives. The significance of the imams is expressed in ways assumed to befit a holy person. John

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[6] Drawing on basic ideas of speech act theory, it is helpful to separate the locutionary (or propositional) aspect of a statement (the literal content of an assertion) from its illocutionary aspects (what the act of making the statement socially performs) and, in turn, noting the perlocutionary effect of the statement (what response is triggered by the statement). On speech act theory, see, J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); J. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). An application of speech act theory to Persian historiography has been explored by Marilyn Robinson Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative.*

[7] "The idea that time is inherently patterned, with some days or months intrinsically privileged over others, is deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition and is addressed by the earliest *mawlid* authors" (Katz, *The Birth,* 142)—for Katz's discussion of how a community garners blessing through remembrance of Muhammad's birthday, see pages 142-168. See also, McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid,* 113-114.

Renard, in his broad study of Islamic hagiography, notes several recurring motifs in Muslim hagiographical birth narratives, such as dreams in expectation of the awaited birth (Abraham, Moses), emissions of light (Kanūh, Moses), painless childbirth (Muḥammad), and speaking infants (Jesus).[8] These motifs and many more frequently appear in the birth accounts considered in this study, thus connecting the imams to Muslim memories of pre-Islamic prophets and incorporating them into a coherent sacred history.[9] The biographers sought to emphasize the connection between their subjects and a contiguous prophetic tradition. Marion Katz's work on narratives of Muḥammad's birth shows that these same themes are used in relation to the Prophet.[10] It should be noted, however, that the followers of ʿAlī were writing books about the first imam's entry into the world by the early 3rd/9th century, a full two centuries before we find similar works devoted to the birth of the Prophet.[11] Even the earliest accounts of Muḥammad's birth seem to have been modeled on narratives already in circulation about ʿAlī, who appears to have been the first Muslim saint-figure to have elaborate birth narratives widely disseminated among his followers.[12]

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[8] John Renard, *Friends of God*, 15-30. On these motifs in early Christian hagiography, see Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover: Brown University Press, 1987), 77-81.

[9] There are many ways one could comment upon the explicit references to prophets, as well as more subtle imagery associated with particular prophets. The examples which I note later in this chapter, and in subsequent chapters, are simply meant to illustrate the pervasive connection between the imams and the prophets. There is a categorical association which is established by example: the imams are like prophets. This connection is confirmed in doctrinal works that considered the imamate to be a part of *nubūwa* (prophethood), though Shiʿi theologians would also emphasize that they are not synonymous categories: Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai, *Shiʿa*, translated by Sayyid Husayn Nasr (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 1380 [2001]), 145, 185-186. But the biographies of the imams consistently reflect and reinforce an assumption that the imams and prophets are a similar type of people. The stories of the imams demonstrate a typology of mankind, where the imams are a certain kind of people who do certain types of things and have certain kinds of things happen to them. For other discussions of similarities between the imams and prophets, see Khalid Sindawi, "al-Ḥusain ibn ʿAlî and Yaḥyâ ibn Zakariyyâ in the Shîʿite sources: a comparative study," *Islamic Culture* 78, 3 (2004), 37-53; Sindawi, "Noah and Noah's Ark as the Primordial Model of Shiʿism in Shiʿite Literature," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi nuova serie* 1, (2006), 29-48; ibid., "Jesus and Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī Ibn ʾAbū Ṭālib: A Comparative Study," *Ancient Near Eastern Sutdies* 44, (2007), 50-65; ibid., "Link between Joshua Bin Nun and ʿAlī Ibn Abū Ṭālib," *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 47, (2010), 305-321.

[10] Katz, *The Birth,* 12-61.

This chapter treats three different aspects of the imams' early lives: primordial existence (ʿAlī), the maternal relationship (al-Mahdī), and behavior in infancy and young childhood (al-Hādī).[13] Through these stories the biographers provide the reader/audience with information useful for the cultivation of piety centered on the imams while highlighting the imams' continuity with popular memories of sacred history. Furthermore, the authors assert a vision of authority and community which contests views propagated by Sunni leaders. In the course of telling these stories, the authors draw on a wide range of cultural and literary symbols and promote certain understandings of nature, social relations, and the divinely-guided community.

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[11] According to Katz, the earliest work on ʿAlī's birth is attributed to Wahb b. Wahb b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Zamʿa (Abū al-Bukhturī) (circa 200/815) whereas the earliest Sunni work on Prophet's birth seems to have been by al-Quḍāʿī (d. 454/1062): 6, 8.

[12] Katz, *The Birth,* 6-12.

[13] The focus on a particular imam for each section is simply designed to give some structure to the discussion and an entry point into the topic. But in most all cases, any of the imams could be chosen as the example for each section. The topics are not specific to the imams chosen, but in fact, they are nearly interchangeable. The specifics often differ with each imam, but the overriding symbols and motifs—the concern of this study—are generally shared by all of the imams. I will attempt to make note of any exceptions to this notion.

II.A. Spiritual Origin: Preexistence and the Conception of Imam ʿAlī

"Light is one of the most prevalent representations of Muhammad's prophetic mission," notes Uri Rubin, who goes on to present a fascinating analysis of a particular aspect of light imagery in Islam: the preexistent divine light known as *nūr Muḥammad.*[14] The notion that Muḥammad received a preexistent divine light (*nūr*) which was passed to him through the generations of prophets beginning with Adam is not a distinctly Shiʿi idea. Accounts of Muḥammad's reception of the divine light are found in the works of Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845) and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), as well as later Sunni scholars, such as al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).[15]

The exact nature of this light, however, is not easily defined. The early extant descriptions of *nūr Muḥammad* in both Sunni and Shiʿi works offer little by way of doctrinal explanation, typically offering vague references instead. In Ibn Hishām's (d. 213/828 or 218/833) biography of the Prophet we find the idea that some aspect of Muḥammad existed prior to the creation of the world, and that this pre-existent substance passed through Muḥammad's ancestors until it reached him.[16] Often associated with the primordial covenant between God and his prophets (*al-mīthāq*),[17] this "spermatic substance," observes Rubin, reflects notions of heredity and nobility found in pre-Islamic poetry and becomes increasingly represented through light imagery in early Muslim sources.[18] In its most simple form, God created this light before all the rest of creation and then, as part of his covenant with his creation, he placed the light into the loins of Adam. The luminous substance was then passed from prophet to prophet (or alternately, through an unbroken line of infallible progenitors) until it reached Muḥammad.[19]

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[14] Uri Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light," 62. See also, ibid., "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shīʿa Tradition," *JSAI* 1, (1979), 41-65; Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'sm: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam,* tr. David Streight, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), especially 29-59; Soufi, "The Image of Fāṭima," 155-165; U. Rubin, "Islamic Retelling of Biblical History," in *Adaptions and Innovations: Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century, Dedicated to Joel Kraemer,* eds. Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stern, (Paris: Peeters, 2007), 299-313; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 74-81.

[15] For the many references, see Rubin, "Pre-existence," *passim.*

This doctrine has greater prominence in Shiᶜi tradition which, unlike Sunni tradition, holds that ᶜAlī and the imams were participants in the reception and passing on of this divine light/substance. According to most Shiᶜi descriptions, the light was divided between Muḥammad and ʿAlī. The *Ithbāt al-waṣīya* begins its section on Imam ʿAlī with these words from the Prophet Muḥammad:

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[16] Ibn Isḥaq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Isḥāq's* Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*,* introduction and translation by A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 69, 72. Ibn Saᶜd and al-Ṭabarī had similar narratives: discussed by Rubin, "Pre-existence," 67.

[17] This concept is referred to in the Qurʾān, such as *Sūrat Āl ᶜImrān* (3): 81, among other places. See also, Bosworth, "Mīt͟hāḳ," EI^2; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide,* 33-37.

[18] Rubin, "Pre-existence," 67-92. See also Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide,* 29-37; ibid. "Savoir c'est pouvoir," 262-263.

[19] Rubin suggests the term *nūr Allah* is a different substance, which is only passed on from prophet to prophet, not through all of the ancestors; whereas *nūr Muḥammad* passes, via procreation, through all of the ancestors: "Prophets and Progenitors," 44-45. However, I am not fully convinced the distinction can be drawn so cleanly. See also Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide,* 38-42; ibid. "Savior c'est pouvoir. Exegeses et implications du miracle dan l'imamisme ancient (Aspects de l'imamologie duodecimaine, V)," in *Miracle et karama*, edited by Denise Aigle, 251-286 (Turnhout, 2000), 256-258.

> ʿAlī and I were a light on the forehead of Adam. We were passed along from the pure loins to the chaste pure wombs (*min al-aṣlāb al-ṭāhira ilá al-arḥām al-muṭahhara al-zākīya*) until we reached the loins of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. The light was then separated into two parts. One part came to ʿAbd Allāh and the other part to Abū Ṭālib. I came forth from ʿAbd Allāh and ʿAlī came forth from Abū Ṭālib.[20]

This luminous substance, therefore, which symbolized, verified, and perhaps empowered the prophets of history (including Muḥammad) is also inherited by ʿAlī. Throughout the biographies of the imams, from their births to their deaths, light is a recurring image—evoking the memory of all God's messengers. But light imagery and its significance is most prominent in narratives of the imams' births, particularly that of Imam ʿAlī.[21] The messages conveyed through these narratives—and reflected even in the short passage quoted above from the *Ithbāt*—regularly highlight ʿAlī's preexistence, his relationship to the Prophet, and his foreordained role as *waṣī* (trustee/inheritor) of the prophet's divinely-appointed authority. The *Ithbāt,* for instance, frames the entire sacred history of the *waṣīya* around the understanding that God created the primordial light of Muḥammad and ʿAlī before his creation of the world and protected its transference from Adam to the last imam, al-Mahdī, through an unbroken succession of *awṣīyā'* (trustees).[22] Almost half of the book is devoted to listing and describing this pure race of trustees of the holy substance, often including descriptions of the 'pure women' (the mothers) through whom the substance passed.[23]

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[20] *Ithbāt*, 133. Cf. Irbilī, *Kashf,* I:518-519; al-Bursī, *Mashāriq*, 99; Baḥrānī, *Madīna maʿājiz,* I:53.

[21] The examples are far too numerous to warrant listing. It may be noted, however, that al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād* (and subsequently al-Ṭabrisī's *Iʿlām*) makes little use of light imagery. His birth narratives are, in general, much more streamlined than the others but never absent entirely. Al-Ṭabrisī expands the birth narratives to some extent in his *Iʿlām*. These two works stand out as unique in this regard (the lack of extensive light imagery) among the biographies of the imams in this formative period and among later works.

The collective biographies of the imams draw upon these images, using them to theologically validate and symbolically decorate each of the imams. Ibn Shahrāshūb relies on light imagery throughout his work and, like the author of the *Ithbāt,* explicitly incorporates the idea of Muḥammad and ʿAlī existing as light prior to the creation of the world. Beginning with Muḥammad's birth, Ibn Shahrāshūb recounts narratives from various perspectives which repeatedly reference light as a central feature.[24] ʿAlī is brought into the discussion early, appearing frequently in the description of

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[22] For the author of *Ithbāt*, there has been an unbroken chain of *awṣīyā'* from Adam to the Shiʿi imams which includes the known prophets of history. In this paradigm, which is common among twelver Shiʿi scholars, all prophets are also *awṣīyā'*. The prophets are a distinct type of *waṣī*, one that brings a new message from God, but they are *awṣīyā'* just the same.

[23] For a discussion of *Ithbāt* in this regard, see Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light," 92-99; Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide,* 41-42.

[24] *Manāqib*, I: 48-69, II: 196-200.

Muḥammad.[25] At times the connection between the two is quite explicit, as when the Prophet remarks that "ʿAlī and I were created from one light."[26]

These stories seem to have had popular appeal, for they were used in the preaching of Shiʿi leaders. This is seen in al-Fattāl al-Nīsābūrī's (d. 508/1114-5) popular collection of lectures, *Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn* (*Garden of the Preachers*), which includes a session on this topic. And most biographers after the 12th century also include several narratives of this sort.[27]

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[25] When Fāṭima bt. Asad told Abū Ṭālib about the visions seen at the birth of Muḥammad by his mother Āmina, Abū Ṭālib said to Fāṭima: "Are you surprised by this? Truly you will conceive and give birth to his trustee and his advisor (*bi-waṣīhi wa-wazīrihi*).... Have patience with me for a valiant child, for it will come upon you in the same way, except for the prophethood": *Manāqib,* I: 58. See also: *Ithbāt,* 133; Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. ʻAlī al-Faṭṭāl, *Rawḍat al-wāʻizīn,* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Aʻlamī lil-Maṭbūʻāt, 1986), 92.

[26] *Manāqib*, III: 311. Cf. al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn fī asrār Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 2001), 99; Majlisī, *Jalā' al-ʿuyūn: tārīkh-i chahārdah maʿṣūm,* edited by Sayyid ʿAlī Imāmiyān (Qum: Surūr, 1387 [2008-9]), 289-290; Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār fī aḥwāl Muḥammad wa-Ālihi al-aṭhār, ʻalayhim al-salām*, 4 volumes, edited by Ghulām Riḍā Mawlānā al-Burūjirdī (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Maʻārif al-Islāmīyah, 1411- [1990 or 1991-]) I: 9-19; Baḥrānī, *Madīna maʿājiz: al-a'immah al-ithnay ʿashar wa-dalā'il al-ḥujaj ʿalá al-bashar*, 8 volumes, edited by ʿIzzat Allāh al-Mawlā'ī al-Hamdānī (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Maʿārif al-Islāmīyah, 1413-1416 [1992 or 1993- 1995]), I: 53. Although al-Mufīd does not indulge in extensive use of light imagery, the connection between Muḥammad's essence and that of ʻAlī's is made explicit by citing the Prophet's words that he and ʻAlī were made from the same clay (I: 43-44 (Eng: 27); see also *Iʿlām,* 172; Majlisī, *Tārīkh*, 293-4). Furthermore, *Iʿlām,* which draws primarily from al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād,* uses some light imagery in the section on Muhammad's birth (25). Al-Mufīd's work begins with ʿAlī.

[27] Al-Fattāl, *Rawḍat,* 87-93; al-Bursī, *Mashāriq,* 58-63; Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 289-294; Baḥrānī, *Ḥiliyat al-abrār*, I: 9-19, II: 9-13; Baḥrānī, *Madīna maʿājiz,* I: 45-56; Muḥammad Muḥammadī Ishtihārdī, *Sīrat al-maʻṣūmīn al-arbaʻat ʻashar: al-musammá bi-Muntaqá al-durar: dirāsah mūjazah wa-muyassarah wa-hādifah ʻan ḥayat al-maʻṣūmīn al-arbaʻah ʻashar*, 3 volumes (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Balāgh, 2008), I: 35. Furthermore, in many cases, the primordial light of Muḥammad and ʿAlī is extended to include Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn (*Dalā'il,* 59-60; ʿAlī b. ʿĪsá Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma fī maʿrifat al-a'imma*, 4 volumes, edited by ʻAlī al-Fāḍilī ([Iran]: Markaz al-Ṭibāʻa wa'l-Nashr li'l-Majmaʻ al-ʻĀlamī li-Ahl al-Bayt, 1426 [2005-6]), II: 164-165, 173-174; Majlisī, *Tārīkh*, 292), and in other cases explicitly includes all of the fourteen infallibles (al-Bursī, *Mashāriq,* 63; Majlisī, *Tārīkh*, 310; Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, I: 9-19). Cf. Clohessy, *Fatima,* 68-72.

Narratives related to the conception of ʿAlī—his transition from primordial light/seed to physical presence in the womb of his mother—are particularly fascinating. One story that appears in numerous biographies describes the spermatic substance being transferred directly from a heavenly fruit to the loins of Abū Ṭālib which, upon reaching the womb of Fāṭima, causes the earth to tremble. In the account found in Ibn Shahrāshūb's *Manāqib*, Jābir al-Anṣārī[28] tells the story of Abū Ṭālib, the father of ʿAlī, going to see a monk (*rāhib*) named al-Mithram b. Daʿīb who was one of the oldest surviving followers of the true God. Al-Mithram kissed Abū Ṭālib and showed his deep gratitude to God for the encounter.[29] Then al-Mithram informed Abū Ṭālib that he would become the father of the next saint (*walī Allah*) and that he would be named ʿAlī. The story continues:

> Then [Abū Ṭālib] said, "What proof is there of this?" [Al-Mithram] responded, "What would you like?" [Abū Ṭālib] said, "food from heaven, at this moment." So the monk prayed for this and he had not finished his words before a tray arrived with fruits from heaven—fresh dates, grapes, and pomegranates. [Abū Ṭālib] ate some pomegranate and it transformed into liquid in his loins. Then he had intercourse with Fāṭima and she became pregnant with ʿAlī and the earth trembled for days and quaked because of them.

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[28] On Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr al-Anṣārī, see Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb,* 4 volumes, edited by Ibrāhīm al-Zaybaq and ʿĀdil Murshid (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1996), v. 2, 42-43; Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt,* 30 volumes, edited by Muḥammad Ḥujayrī, Otfried Weintritt, Māhir Zuhayr Jarrār, and Benjamin Jokisch (Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, in Kommission bei F.A. Brockhaus, 1931), v. 11, 27-28; Etan Kohlberg, "An Unusual Shīʿī *isnād,*" *Israel Oriental Studies* 5, (1975), 142-149; Juynboll, G. H. A., *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 259-260.

[29] For a discussion of kissing as a sign of devotion, see chapter three. See also, below.

Here we see the generative act that creates ʿAlī occurring prior to the sexual intercourse of his parents. The substance which defines ʿAlī is transmitted to the father through the fruit and the sex act is a transference of the spermatic seed from one vessel (the father) to another vessel (the mother) and not a generative act itself.

As the story continues, the violent shaking of the earth caused by ʿAlī's appearance in his mother's womb frightens Abū Ṭālib's tribe and topples their idols. Abū Ṭālib takes the opportunity to stand before his people and preach to them about the reason for the quake and to call them to obedience, saying, "O people, truly God has brought forth the event of this night. He has created in it a man whom if you do not obey him and consent to his rule (*wilāyah*) and testify to his imamate, God will not cease [this calamity] that is upon you." After the people consent, the story goes on to describe ʿAlī's birth:

> Fāṭimah went to the house of God [ie- the Kaʿba] and said, "Lord, I am a believer in you and in what has come from you among prophets and scriptures, [and I am] a testament to the words of my grandfather Abraham and thus to the right of the family of this house and to right of the child in my belly whose birth has become easy on me."[30] Then the house opened and she entered it. And then she was with Eve, Mary, Āsīyah [wife of Pharaoh], the mother of Moses, and others who attended to her as they had at the birth of the Prophet of God.
>
> When [ʿAlī] was born he prostrated on the ground and said, "I testify that there is no god but God; and I testify that Muḥammad is the prophet of God; and I testify that ʿAlī is the *waṣī* of Muḥammad the prophet of God; by Muḥammad God has sealed the prophethood and by me God has sealed the *waṣīyah*. I am *amīr al-mu'minīn* [lit- "commander of the faithful"]." Then he greeted the women and asked

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[30] Notice here the ease of childbirth for the mother. This will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

> about their well-being. And the heavens radiated with his light (*wa-ashraqat al-samā' bi-ḍihā'ihi*).

In this account, the full significance of ʿAlī's birth is symbolically illustrated. Taking place in the most holy site on earth (see below) and attended to by the most virtuous women of history, ʿAlī is born with the full knowledge of his mission and his relationship to the Prophet's mission. His casual greeting of Eve, Mary, Āsīyah and the mother of Moses is suggestive of a familiarity he has already developed with them prior to his birth.

In the account, ʿAlī goes on to tell his father to return to see al-Mithram and inform him of the birth, which brings the story full-circle. When Abū Ṭālib goes to the mountain described by ʿAlī to seek out al-Mithram, he finds the monk dead. He is revived to life, however, long enough to be given the news, to which he responds with tears and gratitude before returning to his shroud.[31]

All of the motifs and thematic elements mentioned above can be identified in this single narrative. But the account of al-Mithram and the fruit tray and others like it contrast with stories that indicate that the spermatic substance was physically passed from generation to generation beginning with Adam and ending with the imams. The latter view of how ʿAlī's primordial substance came to the womb of his mother reflects an engagement with different issues/debates than does the idea that Abū Ṭālib (or, in other versions, ᶜAlī's mother directly)[32] received ᶜAlī's substance through the consumption of divine fruit lowered down from the heavens. Most later Shiᶜi biographers of the imams, unlike the author of *Ithbāt*, were comfortable with this tension and retained stories which represented both perspectives. This appears to be the case with all of the biographers from about the 12th century onwards.[33]

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[31] Al-Mithram's body is being protected until the day of resurrection by two snakes, which symbolize his good deeds. These themes will be discussed more in chapters three and five. *Manāqib*, II:197-8. Versions of this account are also found in al-Fattāl al-Nīsābūrī, *Rawḍat,* 88-92; Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 294-300. Smaller portions of the account can also be found in Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*, I: 125-127; Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār,* II: 20-24; Baḥrānī, *Madīna maʿājiz,* I: 45-56; ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿAlī Dukhayyil, *A'immatunā,* 2 volumes (Beirut: Dār al-Murtaḍá, 1982), II: 356-357; Ishtihārdī, *Sirāt al-maʿṣūmīn*, I: 146-147.

One critical aspect of ᶜAlī's birth about which the Shiᶜa universally agree, however, is that it occurred within the walls of the Kaᶜba. Al-Mufīd, in his *al-Irshād*, says,

> He was born in the Sacred House (i.e. the Kaᶜba) in Mecca on Friday, the thirteenth day of the month of Rajab, thirty years after the Year of the Elephant (c. 570). Nobody before or after him has ever been born in the House of God, the Most High. (It was a mark) of him being honoured by God, the Most High, may His name be exalted, and of his position being dignified in its greatness.[34]

Here we see again the consistent interest of the imams' biographers in identifying the time and place of the births and deaths of the imams, thereby providing temporal and spatial boundaries by which the community is able to remember the sacred lives of their infallible guides. The dates and location are accompanied by a rich canon of symbols that reappear regularly, not just in the life of ʿAlī. Marking these moments provides the authors with an opportunity to illustrate the cosmic significance of the imams' passing in and out of the world, and they provide the community with a time each year and a place they can physically approach in pursuit of drawing closer to each beloved imam.[35]

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[32] *Manāqib,* II: 196-197; Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār,* II: 19-20.

[33] The *Ithbāt, al-Irshād,* and *Dalāʾil* all appear to have more restrictive parameters of interpretation than *I'lām, Manāqib,* and most subsequent biographers such as al-Irbilī, Baḥrānī, and Majlisī.

[34] *Al-Irshād,* I: 5 (Eng: 1). Cf. *Ithbāt,* 133; al-Fattāl, *Rawḍat al-wāᶜizīn*, 87; al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij*, I:171; *Manāqib,* II: 196-198; Irbilī, *Kashf,* I: 125-127; Majlisī, *Tārīkh*, 300-301; Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār,* II: 19-26; Baḥrānī, *Ghāyat al-marām wa-ḥujjat al-khiṣām fī taʿyīn al-Imām min ṭarīq al-khāṣṣ wa-al-ʿāmm,* 7 volumes, edited by ᶜAlī ᶜĀshūr (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Tārīkh al-ᶜArabī, 2001), I: 50-54.

The birth of ʿAlī in the Kaʿba further strengthens his ties to the prophetic traditions of Abraham and Ismāʿīl (who are believed to be the original founders of the site of worship) and to Muḥammad (through whom God restored the Kaʿba to its proper purpose after it had become a place of idol worship).[36] The "house of God," as it is often called in medieval sources, is the central locus of God's engagement with humanity and a symbol of pure, authentic Islam. While Fāṭima bt. Asad was inside the Kaʿba, awaiting the birth of the imam, God cared for her. Not only did he send attendants from the holy women of history, as mentioned in the quote above, but other accounts record heavenly fruits coming down to her for sustenance.[37] Furthermore, the idols there fell on their faces before her (or alternatively, at the sound of ʿAlī's voice from within her womb).[38] For the Shiʿa, ʿAlī's birth within the walls of the Kaʿba is a profound and powerful testament to God's selection of him and his descendants.[39]

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[35] This very objective—the marking out of special times and places where divine favor can be uniquely encountered—has long been a point of criticism of the Shiʿa by some Sunnis. Ibn Taymīya is particularly famous for his condemnation of the Shiʿa on this point. See Ibn Taymīya, *Kitab iqtida' al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm,* tr. Muhammad Umar Memon in *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle Against Popular Religion* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 258, 302, 363 n. 320. See also, Renard, *Friends of God,* 279-281. Al-Mufīd gave an explicit theological defense of visiting pilgrimage sites related to the imams through a comparison to the Kaʿba: McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd,* 113-114.

[36] On the significance of the Kaʿba, see A. J. Wensinck, "Kaʿba," EI^2; Uri Rubin, "The Kaʿba: Aspects of its Ritual Functions", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8, (1986), 97–131; Beverly White Spicer, *The Ka'bah: Rhythms of Culture, Faith, and Physiology,* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003); Robert Bianchi, *Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23-36.

II.B. Physical Beginning: Mothers of the Imams and the Birth of Imam al-Mahdī

Among the distinctive features of the collective biographies of the imams is the care taken to identify the mother of each imam, which contrasts with other biographical collections and most Islamic hagiography. The birth stories often include a description of the mother's virtues, her background, and sometimes her own account of the childbirth, and the mothers are venerated collectively in the works considered here. Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ, the mother of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, stands apart in a class of her own, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Interestingly, each of the mothers of the first six imams is described as having a high socio-religious pedigree in one form or another, while the mothers of the last six imams are not. Fāṭima was the daughter of the Prophet. The wife of al-Ḥusayn, and mother of the fourth imam, was said to have been a Persian princess, daughter of the last king of Persia, Yazdigird b. Shahriyār.[40] The *Ithbāt* says that this princess (whom the author calls Jahānshāh) and her sister (called Shahrbānū) were captured during the conquests of ʿUmar, and that the second caliph intended to have them sold in the marketplace.[41] ʿAlī stopped this from happening, insisting that the daughter of a king cannot be sold. He then sought someone to marry them; al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn volunteered, and the sisters readily agreed. The story concludes with ʿAlī telling al-Ḥusayn to take care of Jahānshāh and to treat her well, for she would bear him the best people of the earth (*fa-satalidu li-ka khayr ahl al-arḍ*).[42] The mother of the fifth imam, Fāṭima (known as Umm ʿAbd Allāh), was the daughter of Imam al-Ḥasan. This makes the subsequent imams arguably both Ḥusaynid and Ḥasanid in genealogy, or as Majlisī says "doubly-honored" (*naqīb al-ṭarafayn*).[43] The mother of the sixth imam was a scholar of ḥadīth, known as Umm Farwah. She was the daughter of al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, a jurisprudent and companion of Imam al-Sajjād; al-Mufīd suggests her mother was also a Persian princess.[44]

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[37] Al-Rāwandī, *Kharāʾij wa'l-jarāyih* (Qum: Instishārāt Muṣṭafawī, 1399 H [1979-], I: 171; al-Irbilī, *Kashf,* I: 125-127.

[38] *Manāqib* II: 196, 197; Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 302, 305. Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ is said to have talked to her mother, Khadīja, while still in the womb: see Clohessy, *Fatima,* 78-86.

[39] Furthermore, there is a certain benefit for the Shiʿa in this regard. As was explained to me by a Shiʿi friend, there is comfort in being able to physically pay homage to the site of ʿAlī's birth without the knowledge of Wahhabi onlookers who would otherwise object. Many sites of religious importance to the Shiʿa in modern Saudia Arabia have been destroyed or barred from visitation, particularly during the time of Ḥajj. The Kaʿba, however, can not be obstructed for Shiʿi pilgrims.

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[40] Amir-Moezzi argues that this claim has its roots in the pro-Persian *shuʿūbīya* movement of the early 9th century: "Shahrbānū, Dame du pays d'Iran et mère des Imams: entre l'Iran préislamique et le Shiisme Imamite," *JSAI* 27, (2002), 497-549; Amir-Moezzi, "Ŝahrbānu," EIr.

[41] More often, it is Shahrbānū who is named as wife of al-Ḥusayn and mother of the fourth imam. In the account found in *Dalāʾil,* ʿAlī asks her name and when she says, "Shāhzanān" (meaning, "queen of women"). ʿAlī informs her that this title is reserved for the daughter of the Prophet and that she should be called "Shahrbānawayh" (meaning, "lady of the land"): *Dalāʾil*, 81-82. Shahrbānū is the more regularly cited name. See also, *Irshād,* II: 137 (Eng: 380); *Iʿlām,* 259; *Manāqib,* IV: 189; Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār,* III: 229-230. Other names are occasionally given as well.

[42] *Ithbāt*, 170. Majlisī adds to this line of ʿAlī, saying, "This is a mother of the *awṣiyāʾ* and of my good seed": *Tārīkh*, 833.

[43] Majlisī, *Tāʾrīkh,* 850. Cf. *Ithbāt,* 176; *al-Irshād,* II: 155-157 (Eng: 391-393); *Dalāʾil,* 95; *Iʿlām, 268;* Ḥāzim al-Khāqānī, *Ummuhāt al-a'imma* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥaqq, 1995), 191.

This illustrious pedigree is noticeably absent from the rest of the mothers, though they are no less praised within the biographies. The mother of the seventh imam (al-Kāẓim) was a foreign slave (*jārīya*) purchased by his grandfather for his father.[45] And the mother of each subsequent imam, down to al-Mahdī, was also a slave owned first by someone in the family. Rather than eschewing this reality, the authors of the biographies seize the opportunity to acquit the mothers of suspicion of impurity or iniquity of any kind and to further emphasize the unique, divinely-ordained nature of the imams' lives. This is found in most detail with regard to the mother of the seventh imam, since she is the first of the mothers to be an *umm walad* (term used for a slave who gives birth to her owner's child, lit- "mother of a son").[46] In the account found in *Iʿlām*, Hishām b. Aḥmar recalls a story of Imam al-Ṣādiq sending him out on a very hot day (*yawm shadīd al-ḥarr*) to see a particular African slave trader. Al-Ṣādiq describes the specific features of a slave girl whom Hishām should expect to find there.

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[44] *Ithbāt,* 182; *Irshād,* II: 137, 176, 180 (Eng: 380, 406, 409); *Dalāʾil,* 111; *Iʿlām,* 275.

[45] *Ithbāt*, 189-191; *Irshād,* II: 209, 215 (Eng: 430, 436); *Dalā'il*, 144-147; *Iʿlām,* 297, 310-311*; Manāqib*, 4: 349. The significance of this transition—or perhaps the delicacy of it—is testified by the extra detail provided by the authors of al-Ḳāzim's mother, the first of the slave-mothers of imams.

[46] Aysha Hidayatullah has some references on the topic: "Māriyya the Copt: Gender, Sex and Heritage in the Legacy of Muhammad's *umm walad,*" *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, n. 3 (2010), 221-243, esp. 224-225. Hidayatullah describes the ambigious social position of the *umm walad* as, "somewhere below that of a married woman but above that of an ordinary slave": 225.

But Hishām does not see a slave matching the description. When he returns to al-Ṣādiq, the imam tells him to go back and look again. But when Hishām went to the African again, the man once more hid the slave girl from him. Finally, the African said, “I have a sick servant girl with a shaved head whom I have not shown.” When Hishām told him to bring her out, Hishām recognized her—she fit the imam’s description. When Hishām expressed interest, the man told him to take her, explaining,

> I wanted her [sexually] since I took possession of her, but I wasn’t strong enough to prevail upon her (*aradtuhā mundhu malaktuhā fa-mā qadartu ʿalayhā*). And the man from whom I purchased her also said that he did not have relations with her (*lam yaṣil ilayhā*). I swear that this slave looked up at the moon and it fell into her lap.

After Hishām told the imam what the man had said, the imam sent Hishām back with a hundred *dīnārs*, but the man refused and gave her away for free (*li-wajḥ Allāh*). The story concludes with the imam explaining to Hishām that, “She will give birth to a child for whom there is no barrier between him and God.”[47]

Far from being an incidental affair, the story makes clear that al-Kāẓim’s mother was chosen by God for the purpose of giving birth to the imam and that her virginity was protected for this purpose. She is, in this regard, a pure vessel, counted among the great mothers of the *awṣiyāʾ*. Similar accounts can be found which validate and defend the purity of the other *umm walad* mothers of the imams.[48]

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[47] *Iʿlām,* 310. Al-Ṭabrisī disagrees with al-Mufīd, who al-Ṭabrisī realizes has a very similar account about the mother of Imam al-Riḍā (310-311). Cf. *al-Irshād,* II: 254-255 (Eng 465-466). Cf. *Ithbat,* 201-202; *Manaqib,* IV: 392.

[48] See al-Khāqānī, *Ummuhāt al-aʾimma, passim*.

Let us move to the story of another *umm walad,* al-Mahdī's mother (usually called Narjis), and her son's entry into the world. Narjis is unique among the mothers; although she was slave, she was not purchased from a slave-trader. She was the daughter of a servant, born in the house of Ḥakīma, the daughter of Imam al-Jawād. The *Ithbāt* records:

> The trustworthy from among our teachers have reported that one of the sisters of Abū al-Ḥasan (s.a.) ʿAlī b. Muḥammad (s.a.) [Imam al-Hādī] owned a slave girl who was born in her house and over whom she had authority. Her name is Narjis. When she matured and filled out (*fa-limā kaburat wa-ʿabalat*) Abū Muḥammad [al-Askarī] came upon her and looked at her and she was pleasing to him. Then his aunt [Ḥakīma] said to him, "I see you are looking at her." And he (s.a.) said, "I have not looked at her except with delight." And the noble birth from God—the great and most high—is through her.[49]

In these stories, the honor and integrity of Ḥakīma guarantees the purity of Narjis and the birth story al-Mahdī is preserved primarily in Ḥakīma's voice.[50] In most versions, as in the one below from al-Ṭabrisī's *Iʿlām*, the physical signs of Narjis's pregnancy were kept hidden. But the father, Imam al-Askarī, guides the women through the mysterious and miraculous birth:[51]

> (Ḥakīma bt. Muḥammad b. al-Riḍā (s.a.) [ie- daughter of Imam al-Jawād] reported to me and she said): Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (s.a.) [al-Askarī] called on me and said, "Aunt, break your fast with us tonight for in this night, in the middle of Shaʿbān, God will reveal the proof (*al-ḥujja*) and he is the proof of his world." I said to him, "Who is

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[49] *Ithbāt,* 257. For discussion of the sexuality of the imams, see chapter three.

[50] For a discussion of the presumed integrity of the imams' daughters, see chapter three.

[51] Note should be taken here that although a miraculous event is occurring through the imam's mother and aunt, the imam functions as their guide and assumes the source of agency. The significance of this will be discussed further in chapter three.

> his mother?" He said, "Narjis." So I said to him, "May God make me your sacrifice; there is no sign [of pregnancy] in her." He said, "It is as I said to you."
>
> ([Ḥakīma] said): So I came and when I greeted [her] and sat down she began to remove my shoe. She said to me, "O my lady, how are you this evening?" I said, "No, you are my lady and the lady of my people."
>
> (Then [Ḥakīma] said): She did not acknowledge my words and she said, "What?" So I said to her, "Daughter, God most high is going to grant you tonight a boy, head of the world and the thereafter."
>
> ([Ḥakīma] said): She felt embarrassed and shy.

Imam al-Askarī was living under house arrest at the time and he was allowed few visitors. The Shiʿi sources portray the government authorities as actively attempting to prevent the conception/birth of the next imam.[52] In light of widespread accusations that al-Askarī never fathered a child, the suggestion of a pregnancy which is not visible to anyone helps make sense of the confusion and simultaneously emphasizes God's providence in the matter. In the process, the role of the mother is effectively diminished. Further, it is interesting to note that the mother herself appears to have no knowledge of the pregnancy.

After going to sleep that night, Ḥakīma woke up several times to check on Narjis, and as daybreak drew near, Ḥakīma felt doubts creeping within her. So she sat down to recite the Qurʾān. Her story continues:

> Then [Narjis] woke up in fear and I rushed to her and said, "God's name be upon you." The I said to her, "Do you feel anything?" She

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[52] This conforms to a motif mentioned earlier and also found in stories about Muhammad's birth: Renard, *Friends of God,* 18.

> said, “Yes.” I said to her, “Collect yourself and your heart, for this is what I said to you.”
>
> ([Ḥakīma] said): A weakness (*faṭra*) took hold of me and took hold of her.[53] Then I woke up from the feeling of my lord, then I pulled back the dress from her and there he was (s.a.) prostrated, receiving the earth with his prostrations, so I drew him to me and he was completely clean. Then Abū Muḥammad [al-Askarī] called out to me, “Bring me my son, Aunt.” So I brought [the child] to him and he put his hands under his butt and his back and put [the child’s] feet on his chest. Then he placed his tongue into [the child’s] mouth and passed his hand over [the child’s] eyes, ears, and joints. Then he said, “Speak, my son.” And [the child] said, “I witness that there is no god but God; and I witness that Muḥammad is the prophet of God.” Then [the child] blessed *Amīr al-Muʾminīn* [i.e. Imam ʿAlī] and [each of] the imams until he came to his father, then he stopped.

Soon thereafter, Ḥakīma leaves. She returns the next day to find the child gone, about which Imam al-Askarī states, “we have entrusted him with the one whom Moses’s mother entrusted Moses.” On the seventh day, Ḥakīma returns again and al-Askarī holds the child like the first time, putting his tongue into the child’s mouth “as if he were feeding him milk or honey” (*kaʾannamā yaghudhdhīhi laban*^{an} *aw ʿasal*^{an}). Again the child speaks the same words as before, but also recites two verses of the Qurʾān (28:5-6). The story concludes with a comment from a male servant of the house, who confirms that Ḥakīma was telling the truth.[54]

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[53] In the *Ithbāt* account, the wording says they were overcome with lethargy (*subāt*): 258.

[54] *Iʿlām,* 408-409. Very similar stories are found in *Ithbāt* (257-261) and *Dalā’il* (264-265) though with different lines of transmission. The section on al-Mahdī is missing from extant manuscripts of *Manāqib* (see chapter 1) so we cannot compare Ibn Shahrāshūb’s account. Cf. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *‘Uyūn al-mu‘jizāt* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-A‘lamī li’l-Maṭbū‘āt, 2004), 373-378; al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wal-jarāʾiḥ,* I: 455-456. Although al-Mufīd does not have an elaborate birth narrative, he mentions that Ḥakīma witnessed al-Mahdī’s birth: *al-Irshād,* II: 351 (Eng: 530-531). Most later biographers included one or more of these accounts: see Irbilī, *Kashf,* IV: 237-238; Baḥrānī, *Madīna maʿājiz,* VIII: 1-43; ʿAbbās b. Muḥammad Riḍā

This story gives further illustration of the full range of symbols at use within the birth narratives and provides another example of the roles of the mothers within the literature. In certain respects, the mothers of the imams are portrayed as 'holy incubators,' since they have minimal agency in the process of childbirth.[55]

They are generally passive in their role as carrier of the holy seed, and their significant physical sacrifice is erased from the record. The natural process of childbirth—characterized by impure fluids and significant pain—is replaced within the narratives by blood-free, painless births.[56] This is a common motif in many ancient literatures.[57]

Qummī, *Muntahá al-āmāl,* 2 volumes (Qum: Intishārāt-i Nigāh-i Āshnā, 1388 [2009 or 2010]), II: 495-499; Ishtihārdī, *Sīrat al-maʿṣūmīn,* III: 358-361.

[55] This was suggested to me by Omid Safi, conference panel respondent, "Rethinking History, Reimagining Community," *American Academy of Religion,* (Atlanta: October 30th, 2010).

[56] Al-Kulaynī records a narrative which explains the nature of the imams' births in more categorical terms: Imam al-Ṣādiq says,

> whenever a mother of an imam became pregnant, that day she would feel tired and weak and fall into a faint state where she would be given glad tidings by a man and when she awoke, she would hear the voice of a person beside her that she could not see who would tell her that she had become pregnant with one of the best people of the earth and that she was doing a great deed. Afterwards, the weight of her pregnancy would be gone until the ninth month. Then she would hear the sound of many angels and she would see a great light, which only she and the father could see, and when the child came out he would be facing *qibla* and then sneeze three time and then praise God. Each imam was born circumcised, with a cut umbilical cord, and without any blood. The imam also has all of his teeth and all of that day and night the child would shine with a yellow light from his hands.

[This was translated from Majlisī's citation of the story in his Tārīkh-i Chahārdah (850)]. *Ithbāt,* 163-164; *Dalā'il,* 144-155; Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 62-63. See also, Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide,* 56-59. Sneezing often accompanies the births of the imams, especially in the *Ithbāt,* Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's *ʿUyūn,* and

Furthermore, the mother's role as nourisher and comforter of the infant imams is also typically absent within this literature. Instead, the bond between father and child is emphasized. The fathers are often said to be the ones who fed the child-imams, who carried them, slept by their sides, and instructed them.[58] As in the previous account, the father-imams sometimes put their tongues into the infants' mouths, indicating a transmission of spiritual knowledge.[59] The transmission of mystical truth through saliva is a concept seen in other hagiographies as well.[60] In the biographies of the

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Majlisī's *Tārīkh-i Chahārdah*. In 2 Kings 4:34-35 the child revived by the Prophet Elijah sneezed seven times before coming back to life.

[57] Renard, *Friends of God,* 13-22.

[58] See *Ithbāt,* 144, 158; Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 304; Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār,* II: 28-31. One might contrast the Qur'anic accounts of Mary and the mother of Moses where the role of the mother is generally emphasized.

[59] Other examples of this include: infant Fāṭima (*Iʿlām,* 164; see also next chapter); infant ʿAlī (al-Rāwandi, *al-Kharāʾij,* I: 171; *Manāqib,* II: 199*;* Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 303; Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-maʿājiz,* I: 49); infant ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Akbar (this is al-Ḥusayn's older son—not Imam al-Sajjād—who dies soon after this: mentioned by Sindawi, "The Image of Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī in *Maqātil* Literature" *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 20-21, (2002-2003): 97-98); infant al-Mahdī (*Ithbāt,* 259; *Dalā'il,* 265).

[60] Scott Kugle, *Sufis & Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 110, 195; Amir-Moezzi, "Knowledge is Power: Interpretations and Implications of the Miracle in Early Imamism," in *The Spirituality of Shiʿi Islam*, 193-230 (London: I. B. Taruis, 2011), 200-201; ibid., *Spirituality,* 44 n. 125; Annemarie Schimmel has noted that Greek and Roman poets sometimes used a kiss to symbolize the exchange of souls between two people: Annemarie Schimmel, "'I Take off the Dress of the Bod': Eros in Sufi Literature and Life," in *Religion and the Body,* ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 279. In the Christian Gospel of Mark, the saliva of Jesus appears to have healing powers (8:22-26). Some early Christian thinkers, such as St. Augustine, also believed Jesus transmitted the Holy Spirit to his disciples through a mouth-to-mouth kiss: Nicholas J. Perella,*The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretive History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 18-23. See also, Annmari Ronnberg, "Spittle and Spitting," ER2. The transmission of spittle from teacher to student in Morocco has been recorded by Edward Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco,* 2 vols. (London: Macmilllan, 1926), v. 1, 41.

imams it is often compared to the breastfeeding of the child; at other times, it explicitly takes the place of breastfeeding—thereby erasing another conventional role of the mother.[61]

There are other, more explicit ways in which the priority of the father is emphasized as well. Al-Mufīd records the Prophet telling ʿAlī, "On the Day of Resurrection (all) the people will be summoned by the names of their mothers except our Shīʿa. They will be summoned by the names of their fathers because of their good birth."[62] The presumption behind this statement is that if the identity of the father were known, then the person would be called by that name. By quoting this tradition of the Prophet, al-Mufīd echoes a slanderous notion commonly held by the Shi'a that all non-Shi'a are bastards. Al-Bāqir is said to have claimed, "All people are offspring of fornicatrices (*awlād baghāyā*), with the exception of our Shi'a."[63] As Etan Kohlberg has

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Cf. Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*: *Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 49.

[61] *Manāqib,* II: 199; Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 303-304. Of course, nursing was not always a role assigned to mothers; wet nurses were quite common. In either case, the effort to highlight the role of the father-imam in the physical and spiritual nourishment of the child-imam obscures the role of women who participated in that process. On breastfeeding and nursing in Arabic literature, see Avner Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses: Medieval Islamic Views on Breastfeeding and Their Social Implications* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). Rūmī was said to have breastfed his son; and Abraham received milk from his own fingertips (both in Aflākī (d. 761/1360)): Renard, *Friends of God,* 97. On the connection between breast milk and womb blood, see Kugle, *Sufis & Saints' Bodies,* 93-98. The exchange of saliva is also reminiscent of an initiatory rite in some *futūwa* circles where a salt-water drinking ritual was sometimes replaced with milk; see Lloyd Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-*futuwwat *in Iran,* (London: Routledge, 2010), 76.

[62] This quote, attributed to the Prophet, comes after he finishes telling ʿAlī that they were made from one piece of clay—as quoted earlier in the chapter—wherein he continued, "part of [the clay] was left over and from that God created our Shīʿa": *al-Irshād,* I: 44 (Eng: 27); Cf. *Iʿlām*, 172.

[63] Cited by Kohlberg, "The Position of the 'walad zinā' in Imāmī Shīʿism," *BSOAS* 48, 2 (1985), 241.

pointed out, this accusation was pressed quite literally at times and occasionally provided with a legal basis.[64]

In counterbalance to this obscuring of maternal roles, however, the mothers are frequently highlighted and emphasized as engaged, honored participants in the pregnancies and births. The narratives are often told at least partly in their voice.[65] They commonly have visions/dreams that precede their pregnancies, announcing to them the significance of their role.[66] Throughout the biographies of the imams, the mothers' accounts are presented as legitimate and trustworthy, which presumes their integrity and reliability as individuals. In addition, some of the authors of the biographies go out of their way to praise their virtues.[67] As we have seen in the discussion of ᶜAlī's birth, the experiences and memory of the imams' mothers can play a central role constructing and defending the nature of the imamate. Many of the mothers are said to have been given knowledge about the divine mission of their child prior to the birth, and their testament is structured as a reinforcement of that mission.[68]

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[64] Kohlberg, “The Position of the ‘walad zinā’” 240-242. The idea here is that since non-Shiʿa do not pay the obligatory *khums* (an obligatory alms in Shiʿi law), any dower that a groom uses to contract a marriage would be forbidden money on account of his failure to first pay *khums.* Without a legal dower, the marriage would be considered defective and the child of such an encounter would be considered *mimzīr*. Within Shiʿi legal thought, the *mimzīr* is distinct from, but similar to, the *walad zinā*—the former retaining slightly less severe social ramifications while carrying many of the same connotations. It appears to be heavily influenced by the Jewish rabbinical idea of *mamzer* (ממזר). For discussions of *mamzer* in rabbinic literature, see, Shaye Cohen, “The Origins of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law,” *AJS Review* 10, 1 (Spring 1985), 33; Michael L. Satlow, *Tasting the Dish: Rabbinic Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 56-9, 84-94; Menahem Elon, “Mamzer,” in *The Encyclopaedia Judaica, Second Edition*, 22 vol., New York: Thomson Gale, 2007, v. 13, 444; Herbert W. Basser and Simcha Fishbane, “Mamzer,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism, Second Edition*, Eds. Neusner, Avery-Peck, and Green, 4 vol., (Leiden: Brill, 2005), v. 3, 1625-1631; Simcha Fishbane, “The Case of the Modified *Mamzer* in Early Rabbinic Texts,” in *Deviancy in Early Rabbinic Literature: A Collection of Socio-Anthropological Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 4-15.

[65] Katz notes that most of the widespread birth narratives of the Prophet were also told in his mother’s voice: *Birth,* 32.

[66] Within the *Ithbāt*, the pre-childbirth experiences and visions of ‘Alī’s mother, Fāṭima bt. Asad, play the central role in the conveyance of ‘Alī’s cosmic significance. In fact, the extended narratives which are here told from her perspective are arguably the theological apex of the entire book, transitioning the divine history of the *waṣīya* (spiritual inheritance) from its pre-Islamic to its post-Islamic contexts (see chapter one). We find in this Fāṭima bt. Asad as ederly and barren (*mamnūʿa min al-walad*), making solemn vows (*tandhuru li-dhālik al-nudhūr*) in hopes of conceiving a child. She is regularly told by a sage or priest (*kāhin aw ḥabr*) that she will conceive a child, but she is forced to endure a long period of waiting (*Ithbāt,* 135). When the moment of ʿAlī’s birth arrives, Fatima said,

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> I dreamed that an iron column emerged from my head and beamed into the sky until it reached the highest heavens and then it returned to me and stayed for a moment, then went out from my feet. I asked, "What is this?" It was said, "This is the killer of the unbelievers (*qātil ahl al-kufr*), head of the covenant of victory. His courage is strong and the armies break apart in fear of him. He is the assistance of God to his Prophet and his support against his enemies. And by his love the victorious achieve victory and the joyful receive their joy" (*Ithbāt*, 143).

In this narrative, ᶜAlī's connection to the Prophet is asserted, the signs of divine mission (e.g.- the vision of a column) are provided, and salvation for the community is tied to him. For a discussion of columns of light/iron emanating from the bodies, see Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide,* 58; U. Rubin, "Pre-existence and light," 62-117. Some other examples: Muḥammad (*I'lām*, 25); Fāṭima (al-Burṣī, *Mashāriq,* 133); ᶜAlī (Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 295); al-Ḥasan (*Dalāʾil*, 60); al-Bāqir (*Ithbāt*, 180-181); al-Kāẓim (*al-Irshād,* II: 218 (Eng 438); *Dalāʾil,* 144-145); al-Jawād (Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 960); all the imams together (*Dalāʾil,* 59-60; Baḥrānī, *Ḥiiyat al-abrār*, I: 9-19; Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 850).

[67] Most of these have been collected by al-Khāqānī, *Ummuhāt*, *passim.* Occasionally the mothers are attributed miracles as well: see *Ithbāt,* 176; *Dalāʾil,* 95.

[68] Some examples: Muḥammad's mother claimed knowledge that he would be the head of the people was that he was the one anticipated by the world (*I'lām,* 25). Fāṭima bt. Asad is told of ᶜAlī's mission by a soothsayer (*Ithbāt,* 135). Fāṭima bt. Muḥammad is told about al-Ḥusayn (*Ithbāt,* 163). The mother of al-Riḍā is told, while still in possession of a slave-trader, that she will give birth to "a son such as has not been born in the east or west" (*al-Irshād,* II: 254-255 (Eng 466)).

Even when detailed discussions of the mothers are absent, such as in al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād,* the identity of the mother is always made clear and incorporated into the overall presentation of the nature of the imams. Attention to the character of a person's mother (actual or ancestral) clearly carried cultural significance. Al-Suyūṭī records an instance in which the Prophet clarified his own maternal heritage, saying, "a whore has never given birth to me (*mā waladatnī baghīy^{un}*) since I came out of Adam's loins."[69] Conversely, in the literature at hand, we see examples in which an opponent is derided on the basis of his mother's bad character. After al-Mufīd relates that the wife responsible for poisoning Imam al-Ḥasan was later married to a man from the family of Ṭalḥa, he notes, "Whenever any argument occurred between them and the clans of Quraysh, they would revile them saying: 'Sons of a woman who poisons her husbands (*yā bānī musammat al-azwāj*).'"[70]

The accounts of the mothers bolster the credentials of the imams and help sanction their right to authority. At the same time, they reinforce cultural assumptions about the sanctity of motherhood and the relationship between the honor of the mother and that of her child. Overall, the mothers of the imams are a highly revered group, presumed to be—or explicitly defended as—virtuous, pure, and blameless. Running the gamut from princess to slave, they come from varied economic circumstances and diverse ethnic groups. But their differences pale in the face of one common denominator: each is the mother of an imam, an honor bestowed upon only the most deserving of women.[71]

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[69] Cited in Rubin's "Pre-existence," 73. The quote goes on to say, "the nations have never ceased to transmit me from father to son, till I emerged from the best two Arab clans—Hāshim and Zuhra." The term for "whore" here, *baghī,* is the same that was used to falsely slander Mary; and the one used by al-Bāqir to describe the mothers of all non-Shiʿa (quoted above). Consider also the words of Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd Ṭūsī in his *Ajāʾib al-makhlūqāt*: "There are also good women: they are few, but the existence of the world depends upon them: they give birth to great men" (cited and translated by A. A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: love, madness, and mystic longing in Niẓāmī's epic romance* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 239).

[70] *Al-Irshād,* II: 16 (Eng 287). On the issue of wives and poisoning, see chapter four.

II.C. "Out of the Mouths of Babes and Sucklings": the Child-imam, al-Hādī

The final aspect of imams' early lives to be considered here is the preternatural development they show as children. As the previously quoted birth narratives have already shown, the infant imams are regularly described as having powers of speech and knowledge of religion at the moment of birth.[72] At times, as in the birth account of ᶜAlī above, the imam exhibits fully-developed language skills, knowledge, and reason. In other cases, such as the aforementioned narrative of al-Mahdī, the infant imam displays more limited faculties and linguistic abilities, and these are often connected to the exchange of saliva with the father and the declaration of the *shaḥāda*. In the *Ithbāt*, following the story al-Mahdī's birth, Ḥakīma describes returning to al-Askarī's house after forty days to find that the young imam is walking on his own. He is described as having a most beautiful face and speaking with the most eloquent language.[73] At the sight of this Ḥakīma says, "My lord! Do you see what I see of his power yet he is only forty days old!?" Imam al-Askarī smiles at her and responds, "My aunt, I told you that we are the company of the trustees (*maʿāshir al-awṣīyāʾ*). We grow in a day as others grow in a week; and we grow in a week as others grow in a month; and we grow in a month as others grow in a year."[74]

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[71] "Most deserving" is one of the common descriptions of the mothers: see *Ithbāt*, 176, 182, 216; *Dalāʾil*, 95. See also, Rubin, "Pre-existence," 92-93, 96.

[72] Further examples, beyond those already listed, include: al-Kazim (*Dala'il,* 145).

[73] On the topic of physical beauty, see chapter three.

Let us also consider the entry of another imam into the world—the tenth imam, al-Hādī. In congruence with the other imams, the *Ithbāt* affirms that his birth was "like that of his fathers," and that he was born from a pure mother—a slave named Sumāna[75] about whom Imam al-Hādī later said, "My mother knows of my rights; she is from among the people of heaven."[76] Immediately after the birth narrative, the author of the *Ithbāt* proceeds to a story about the young child and his father, Imam al-Jawād, who is preparing to go on a trip. The father asked his two sons what they would like him to bring them. Al-Hādī replies, "a sword like fire;" while his brother, Mūsá asks for "house cushions." The father approvingly concludes: "Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Hādī] is like me and he [Mūsá] is like his mother."[77] Not long after this took place, Imam al-Jawād was killed, and al-Hādī became imam of the community at approximately seven years of age.

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[74] *Ithbāt*, 259-260. Cf. Irbilī, *Kashf,* IV: 241-242.

[75] The edition of *Ithbāt* which I am using has "Jumāna" here for the mother's name, but this is likely a publisher's typo or scribal error since all other sources have Sumāna.

[76] *Ithbāt*, 228.

[77] *Ithbāt,* 228. Cf. Ishtihārdī, *Sīrat al-maʿṣūmīn,* III:131; Bāqir Sharīf Qarashī*, The Fourteen Infallibles in the History of Islam,* 14 volumes (Qum: Ansariyan, 1999-2010), XII: 27. The gendered nature of the imamate will be more thoroughly discussed in the next chapter. One may note here, however, the manner in which

The stories of the imams as children, like the stories of their adult lives, engage many social and religious debates, including the nature of the imamate, the legitimation of authority in the Muslim community, and the content of public memory.[78] One recurring anecdote that appears in relation to many of the imams concerns their supernatural awareness of the imamate entering them at the moment of their father's death. In the case of al-Hādī, this occurred when he was still a child. In *Dalāʾil*, Ibn Jarīr describes a gathering of women in the family during which the young al-Hādī suddenly became frightened and climbed into his grandmother's lap. When asked what is wrong, he said, "I swear by God that my father has died at this hour." Those who witnessed this wrote down the day it occurred, and when they later received news of al-Jawād's death, they were able to confirm the veracity of al-Hādī's claim.[79] The story reinforces the ontological reality of the imamate and functions as further proof to the community that al-Hādī was indeed the chosen successor of his father and that the child and those nearest him were certain of this fact.

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the imams are entwined with assumptions of masculinity related to valor, weaponry, and heroism; whereas the feminine is characterized by physical comforts.

[78] Like his father, al-Hādī inherited the full position of imam at a very young age. When this occurred during the childhood of his father, some of the imam's followers had concerns about the ability of a child to lead the community. There is reason to assume, therefore, that some of the stories of al-Jawād's youth were circulated specifically to assure those who doubted the child's religious knowledge. By the time of al-Hādī's imamate, however, the issue of a child-imam carried less urgency and the stories of al-Hādī's youth are no more elaborate or extensive than what is found in the accounts of the other eleven imams.

[79] *Dalāʾil*, 214. This story also appears in *Ithbāt,* 230; Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn al-muʿjizāt* (337); al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma* (IV: 22). The story of al-Hādī knowing the moment of his father's death is also told in other ways, from different perspectives: Cf. *Ithbāt,* 229-230; *Dalāʾil,* 215; Majlisī, *Tārīkh* (970); Baḥrānī, *Madīna al-maʿājiz,* VII: 445-446; Ishtihārdī, *Sīrat al-maʿṣūmīn,* III: 136-137.

Other narratives from al-Hādī's youth reveal the overlap of religion and politics in this literature more clearly. The ruling authorities, who are consistently portrayed as attempting to undermine the family of the Prophet, set out to corrupt the child-imam by sending him a teacher who lacked any Shiʿi sympathies. God's plan, however, could not be thwarted and the child proved more knowledgeable than the scholar. In the *Ithbāt,* Muḥammad b. Saʿīd relates that when al-Hādī's father died, a government official (ʿUmar b. al-Faraj al-Murakhajī) was sent to Medina on a mission to eliminate the Shiʿa community. His plan was to place the education of the child-imam in the hands of someone who was extremely erudite but antagonistic toward the Shiʿa. After consulting people in Medina, a stern man named Abū ʿAbd Allāh (known as al-Junaydī) was chosen. He was given a slave-girl as compensation and entrusted with the task of educating al-Hādī in such a way as to put an end to the imams' community.

The plan backfired, however, when al-Junaydī found the child-imam to be more knowledgeable than himself. The teacher told Muḥammad b. Saʿīd, "By God, I teach him a portion of literature in which I think I have excelled, then he dictates to me the section which follows it! The people think that I am teaching him, but by God, I am learning from him!" Some days later, the teacher explained again:

> By God, he is the best of all people and the most virtuous of God's creation. Often upon entering I say to him, 'Look and read your tenth (part?).' Then he says to me, 'Which *sūras* do you want me to read?' I tell him: 'from the long *suras* in which you have not excelled.' He takes them, reading more perfectly than I've ever heard from anyone.

Muḥammad b. Saᶜīd then added that al-Hādī "was certain [of the meaning] of the best Psalms of the Prophet David (s.a.), applying the proverbs from his reading (*wa-jazama aṭyab min mazāmīr dāwud al-nabī ᶜalayhi al-salām alladhī ilayhā min qarāʾitihī yaḍribu al-mathal*)." Finally, driving the point home, al-Junaydī exclaimed, "His father died in Iraq and he was a small boy in Medina who grew up among black slaves. So where did he learn this?!" And the story ends with a claim that al-Junaydī became a follower of the imam.[80]

In these stories, the political and religious commentary stands in sharp relief. This passage about Imam al-Hādī's education speaks to the nature of the imamate while critiquing those who have plot against the will of God. In the process, the author of the biography builds further continuity between the imams and the divine guides of pre-Islamic history. The biographers considered in this study portray all of the imams as having high levels of innate knowledge.[81] Even al-Mufīd—whose work, for most Shiᶜa, epitomizes reliable, unexaggerated accounts of the imams—claims that ᶜAlī embodied "perfection of his intellect, dignity and knowledge of God and His Apostle [s.a.], despite his youth and his being in outward form still only a child."[82] In this manner, the authors further strengthen the resonance between these stories and existing religious ideas.

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[80] *Ithbāt,* 230-231; Ishtihārdī, *Sīrat al-maᶜṣūmīn,* III: 137-138.

[81] The early community of followers of the imams is known to have disputed over whether or not imams were born with their full intellectual capacities or whether it was learned by them. The Zaydis, for instance, largely concurred that the imams had to obtain their knowledge through learning. But the Twelver Shiᶜa typically held that the imams were born with most, if not all, of their knowledge.

[82] *Al-Irshād*, I: 305-306 (Eng: 229-230).

The Hebrew Psalter, for example, records the psalmist's prayer: "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger."[83] The Christian gospels remember Jesus citing this same passage in a response to his accusers;[84] and the Qurʾān famously attributes to the infant Jesus the power of speech, saying, "He will speak to people in the cradle."[85] This Qurʾānic passage is regularly cited by the authors of the imams' biographies when the infant imams speak after their own births. In fact, al-Mufīd's claim regarding ʿAlī's youth is introduced by his comments and reflections on Jesus's speech from the cradle.[86]

II.D. Summary of Observations

A number of observations can be made about the stories of the imams' entrance into the world and their early lives. First, the births are cosmic events of universal relevance which illustrate the ontological reality of the imamate as a timeless institution. Images of light appear in the births of all the imams, a light which is understood as created by God thousands of years prior to the creation of the world. The cosmic significance is further emphasized through signs and wonders which occur at the time of conception and/or birth of the imams. Many of these signs have deep literary and folkloric connection to stories of Muḥammad and the pre-Islamic prophets.

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[83] Psalm 8:2, New International Version.

[84] Matthew 21:16.

[85] *Sūrat al-ʿimrān* (3): 46. Tr.: Qara'i.

[86] *Al-Irshād,* I: 305 (Eng: 229); also see, *a-Irshād,* II: 274-275, 340-341 (Eng 480-481, 524); *Iʿlām,* 408. See also, McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid,* 85.

A second concern that preoccupies the birth narratives is that lingering question of succession. Ultimately, the right to the imamate was a contested claim for all of the imams, not just ʿAlī. Even as this literature was being written, there were many non-Twelver groups of Shiʿa and the legitimate claims of all twelve needed a defense. The birth accounts consistently function as signs that this particular person is the designated inheritor of the *waṣīya.* These accounts insist on the legitimacy of a particular Shiʿi community that has identified the correct imams. In describing the intimate relationship between the Prophet and the imams, defending their righteous mothers, and putting forth stories like that of a child outwitting maleficent ruling authorities, the accounts constantly reinforce the community's legitimacy, not just the imams. This is, therefore, engaged with questions of communal boundaries and those who do not assent to the rightful claims of these imams are marked as outsiders. Although the boundary between these communities is not impenetrable—conversion is possible, as we see in the case of al-Hādī's teacher—the communities are portrayed as entirely distinct, with different eternal destinies.

A third concern we can see in these narrative is that of purity. In association with a special spermatic substance/seed, the light of their pure, pre-existent nature was passed on to the imams through an undefiled race of fathers and mothers who were also *awṣiyā* (trustees) of the seed. In some accounts a more direct transference from heaven to earth is emphasized through the consumption of heavenly fruits which pass the light/seed on to the fathers or mothers of the imams. But the purity of the seed is emphasized regardless, a point further confirmed by the bloodless births.

Fourth, the birth narratives of the imams meet the specific needs of a religious community. They offer a time in the year when the births can be remembered, and they supply a place on earth that can be visited—both of which were assumed by the community to be a means of earning divine favor/blessing. These are stories of devotion and they a cultivate fondness and reflect the devotion of a community that has staked its hope on the imams' guidance.

Although the authors of the biographies do not follow a set formula or script in their presentations of the imams, pervasive concerns and patterns exist that unite this genre even at its formative stage of development. Symbols and motifs repeat and appear in reference to all of the imams. The consistent signs which occur at their births (particularly linked with light motifs) speaks to these concerns, as does the authors' apparent need to clarify the blamelessness of each of their mothers. The lives of the imams are not identical, but the different accounts have immense thematic overlap and symbolic convergence. We are learning less about twelve individuals, and more about who an imam is. And toward that goal, we look to the imam's body.

Chapter Three: Embodied Ideals

> "The saint's body acts as a mirror for the religious
> virtues around which society can adhere..."
> -Scott Kugle[1]
>
> "There is no sword but Dhū al-Faqār;
> there is no man but ʿAlī."
> -a popular saying attributed to the Prophet

Once the imams came into the world, they lived in the form of real, corporeal bodies. Perhaps it should go without saying, but it deserves reiteration here: the biographies of the imams primarily relate narratives of how the imams' bodies performed various actions.[2] Reading the biographies with this emphasis helps illuminate aspects of the literature in unique ways.

In order to begin a fruitful exploration of the literature in the regard, we should also note two critical assumptions undergirding the biographies. First, the imams were perfect, infallible (*maʿṣūm*), and therefore, in a fundamental manner, ideal.[3] Second, the imams were men, i.e. - they were presumed to have anatomically male bodies and to have enacted the performance of their bodies in relationship to cultural presumptions of masculinity. The significance of the imams as men who have male bodies has not been adequately discussed by scholars of Shiᶜism, despite its undisputable centrality. Masculinity, like any gender category, is unstable and constantly negotiated by society. Within the biographies at hand, the imams' bodies often function as symbols of a unique vision for virtue, manliness, and group loyalty (*ᶜaṣabīya*)[4]—one that stood adamantly opposed to the ruling authorities' perceived abuses, their perversion of justice, and their censorship of public memory. An analysis of the biographies of the imams must, therefore, explore this aspect of how the imams are remembered.[5]

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[1] Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies,* 78.

[2] By speaking of the body, in this context, I am not only address issues of gender and sexuality, but bodily actions more broadly, though certainly inclusive of those aspects as well. For an overview of how questions about the body are used in scholarship, see Caroline Walker Bynum, "Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 22, 1 (1995), 1-33.

[3] While there were early Shiʿi theological debates about the nature and extent of the imams' infallibility, the trend was toward a fairly comprehensive understanding of it. See W. Madelung, "ʿIṣma," EI^2. On the early historical debates about the roles of the imams in general, see Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation,* 6-18.

How the model lives of the imams was entwined with their masculine bodies, and to what effect, is the subject of this chapter. But we can add that the stories of the imams' lives stand in the shadow of their impending death. The betrayals and deaths endured by each of the imams (the subject of the next two chapters) are foreshadowed by the authors throughout their lives, occasionally with specific predictions. And thus the bodily performances must be read with this foreknowledge as well.

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[4] On ᶜaṣabīya, see F. Gabrieli, "ᶜAṣabiyya," EI^2; Helmut Ritter, "Irrational Solidarity Groups: A Socio-Psychological Study in Connection with Ibn Khaldūn," *Oriens* 1, 1 (1948), 1-44; Fuad Khuri, *Imams and Emirs: State, Religion and Sects in Islam,* (London: Saqi Books, 1990), 50-56. As Ritter notes, the presence of social solidarity, or *ᶜaṣabīya,* can effectively erase questions of right or wrong and create a space where things that would otherwise be prohibited become permissible: "Irrational Solidarity Groups," 7, 8.

[5] It is my hope that by considering the role of the imams as men, we may continue the small bit of progress that has been made since Nadia Maria El Cheikh's apt criticism of the field:

> The conceptualization of men is not a developed area of study. While women and their construction in historical and literary texts is now considered a valid object of study seen in a proliferation of works on the subject and in a large entry in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* entitled "al-mar'a," no equivalent scholarship can be found on men. We read about men as caliphs, judges, bureaucrats and military officers but not "men" as a defined gender category. By not making men or masculinity an object of study the secondary literature sustains a political construction in to our sources ("In Search for the Ideal Spouse," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 45, 2 (2002), 194-195).

In each of the three examples which form the basis of this chapter, the gendered nature of the imamate is apparent and many of the same themes run throughout. I highlight the explicit descriptions of the imams' bodies and their manly performances in the example of Imam al-Bāqir. With Imam al-Kāẓim, I focus upon the miraculous performances of the imams. And finally, I use the example of Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ, another of the fourteen infallibles (though not an imam), to further nuance some of the gendered conceptions of the human ideal. These are not three discreet topics. Each overlaps with the other and it is merely for the practical goals of explication that I've separated them at all. Throughout the chapter, we see that the authors of the biographies portray the bodies of the imams in ways that use human history to convey broader visions for the community and hope for a more ideal social order.

III.A. Bodily Inheritance: The Masculinity of Imam al-Bāqir

One place to begin talking about how the bodies of the imams are remembered is simply to consider how their appearances are described. Physical descriptions of the imams in the biographies highlight the significance projected onto their bodies, physical signs which mark the boundaries of their unique concentration of the divine light, guidance, and blessing.[1] As such, their bodies are both objects of devotion and models of physical perfection.

Most forms of classical Arabic biography give little, if any, attention to the physical descriptions of an individual. Any such comments are usually made in passing and are typically reserved for those with a distinguishing disability or deformity. Descriptions of prophets or saints, however, often contain references to their subject's physical presence and appearance.[2] With rare exceptions, holy men and women are consistently remembered for their physical beauty—the archetype being Joseph, whose attractiveness is memorialized in the Qurʾan.[3] In keeping with this expectation of holy men, the biographies of the imams often contain brief references to their physical features, particularly the beauty of their faces, which are often described in tandem with the light which shone from their bodies.[4] Occasionally, the descriptions were fairly detailed. Ibn Shahrāshūb says of Imam al-Bāqir: "He was of medium height, with delicate skin and slightly-curly hair. There was a brown birthmark on his cheek and a red one on his body. He had a slender waist, a beautiful voice, and a bowed head."[5]

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[1] Frequently, the physical attributes of the imams were expressly compared with those of the Prophet. Al-Ḥasan was said to resemble the Prophet from the waist down and al-Ḥusayn was said to resemble the Prophet from the waist up: *al-Irshād*, II: 27 (Eng: 296). Also, on al-Ḥusayn's appearance in *maqātil* literature, see Sindawi, "The Image of Ḥusayn," 83-90. In *Dalāʾil,* Fāṭima is recorded inquiring from the Prophet about the inheritance he would leave for her sons. The Prophet tells her that to al-Ḥasan he has left his prestige and power and to al-Ḥusayn he has left his courage and his generosity (7).

[2] Sunni and Shiʿi communities cultivated a rich legacy of remembrance related to the physical characteristics of the Prophet Muḥammad, particularly in the form of the *ḥilya*. See Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is his Messenger* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 32-45; Oleg Grabar, "The Story of Portraits of the Prophet Muhammad," *Studia Islamica* 96, (2003): 19-38, VI-IX. An account in *Iʿlām* declares the Muḥammad was regularly protected by God in battles from being disfigured (98, Eng: 129).

Thus, while the imams figuratively embody many things within this literature, they literally embody a host of attractive qualities. The physical descriptions of the imams go beyond clarifying that they had no deformities or disabilities—which would detracted from their presumed manliness and raised questions about their qualifications for leadership—and assume that an ideal body is the most attractive body. Their physical descriptions, therefore, project idealized conceptions of male beauty and physical constitution. As social standards change, so do the descriptions. Between the 10th and 12th centuries, a significant transition in the way Muslims valorized masculinity took place.[6] Unfortunately, very little study has research has been done on this topic,[7] and I will only make a passing note here. We can contrast, for example, Ibn Shahrāshūb's (12th century) description of al-Bāqir, quoted above, with al-Mufīd's (late-10th century) description of him as "big-bodied."[8] Perhaps related to the increased idealization of the body of the young man (fatá),[9] Ibn Shahrāshūb had a decidedly more refined and delicate image of al-Bāqir than did al-Mufīd. But for both, there seems to be a connection between their physical beauty and their exemplary lives. Simply put, they have virtuous bodies, both in form and function. At times, physical attributes act as proofs of their imamate,[10] and thus their bodies reflect the perfection that characterizes their spirits.[11] The connection between a pure spirit and a perfect body is an ancient one, and is reflected in this literature in many ways.

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[3] Sūrat Yūsuf (12): 31. For a discussion of Joseph's beauty in relationship to the religious significance of the female body, see Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Faces of Sin: Corporal Geographies in Contemporary Islamist Discourse," in *Religious Reflections on the Human Body,* ed. Jane Marie Law, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 67-75, especially 70; A. Schimmel, "Eros in Sufi Literature and Life," 280.

[4] Examples abound, concerning Fātima bt. Asad: al-Irbilī, *Kashf,* I: 124; Muḥammad: *Ithbāt,* 107; al-Ḥasan: *Irshād,* II: 5-7 (Eng: 279-280); al-Ḥusayn: *Iʿlām,* 219; al-Kāẓim: *Irshād,* II: 218 (Eng: 438); al-ʿAskarī: *al-Irshād,* II: 321 (Eng: 512); See also, Rubin, "Pre-existence," 83-85; Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet,* 19-20;

[5] *Manāqib,* IV: 227.

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[6] Interestingly, Jo Ann McNamara discusses "profound disturbances in the gender system" in Europe at roughly the same time period in "The *Herrenfrage:* The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages,* ed. Clare A. Less, with assistance from Thelma Fenster and Jo Ann McNamara (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994): 3-29. She coins the term *Herrenfrage* (literally, "the man question") in her discussion of the significant changes in how masculinity was conceived at the time

[7] Compare this to the many studies on roughly the same time period in Christian contexts. See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Richard Trexler (ed.), *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1993); Clara Lees (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities*; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (eds.), *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997); William E. Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050-1230* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Virgina Burrus, *The Sex Lives of the Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Tison Pugh, *Queering Medieval Genres* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis, *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005); Jennifer Thibodeaux (ed.), *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Hamphsire: Palgrave Macmillian, 2010); Cordelia Beattie, *Intersections of Gender, Religion, and Ethnicity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Lynda Coon, *Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[8] "*Kāna rajl^{an} badīn^{an}*": *al-Irshād,* II: 161. Howard translates it as "a well-built man": 396. Compare this with a reported description of Imam ᶜAskarī, also recorded by al-Mufīd: "a young dark-skinned man with a good figure, a beautiful face, and an excellent body" (*rajl asmar ḥasan al-qāma jamīl al-wajh jayyid al-badan ḥadīth al-sinn*): *al-Irshād,* II: 321. Howard translates this as "a brown man...well-built, handsome, with an excellent physique and young in years": 512.

[9] *Futūwa*, an abstraction of the Arabic word for young man (*fatá*; Persian- *javānmard*), is often glossed as "chivalry," but can more literally—and more to the point, for this study—be translated simply as "young-

The biographies also demonstrate that the beautiful bodies of the imams are sites of devotion, affection, and blessing. The spectacular birth accounts described in

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manliness." The use and development of the term *futūwa* represents a change from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, during which *murūʾa* was a more common term for male virtue ideals (see Bichr Farès, "Murūʾa," EI^2; Goldziher, Muslim Studies, 1-44; Ridgeon, Morals and Mysticism, 6-7). *Murūʾa* virtues revolved around tribal leadership (Farès, "Murūʾa," EI^2; Ridgeon, Morals and Mysticism, 6-7.), but the concept of *futūwa* in its early stages emphasized an alternate vision for social cohesion based on military prowess, refined manners, and a code of self-sacrifice. On *futūwa/javānmardī*, see Gerard Salinger, "Was the *Futuwa* an Oriental Form of Chivalry?" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 94, 5 (19 October, 1950): 481-493; Claude Cahen, "Futūwwa," EI^2; Mohsen Zakeri, "Javānmardī" EIr; Jaᶜfar Mahjub, "Spiritual Chivalry and Early Persian Sufism," tr. L. Lewisohn and M. Bayat in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi,* ed. Leonard Lewisohn, (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993): 549-581; Mohsen Zakeri, *Sasanid soldiers in early Muslim society: the origins ofᶜ'Ayyārān and Futuwwa,* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995); Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs,* 161-243; Robert Irwin, "'Futuwwa': Chivalry and Gangsterism in Medieval Cairo," *Muqarnas* 21, Essays in Honor of J. M. Rogers (2004): 161-170; Lloyd Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism*.

[10] An example of this would be the marking on al-Jawād's body, which al-Mufīd, for one, presents as a proof of al-Jawād's imamate: *Irshād:* II: 278 (Eng 483). Cf. *Ithbāt,* 218. The marking harkens back to the "seal" said to have been on Muḥammad's body. See also, Rubin, "Pre-existence," 104; Victor Turner and Edith Turner, "Bodily Marks," ER2.

[11] Similar observations have been made regarding Muslim descriptions of the Prophet's physical beauty: Schimmel, *And Muhammad is his Messenger,* 34; Ruth Roded, "Alternate Images of the Prophet Muhammad's Virility," in *Islamic Masculinities,* ed. Lahoucine Ouzgane (London: Zed Books, 2006): 58. Soufi discusses the connection between Fāṭima's beauty and her purity: "The Image of Fāṭimah," 162-167.

the last chapter provide evidence for this, as does the affection shown to the child-imams by their fathers. The fathers' loving treatment of their child-imams models for the community the significance which the imams' bodies should have. Likewise, other interactions between the imams and their devotees recorded in the biographies are an indication of how one ought to treat such a sacred person. In a widespread account of Imam al-Bāqir's boyhood, the young imam is taken to Jābir al-Anṣārī by his father.[12] The highly revered, now-elderly companion of the Prophet demonstrates his love and affection for al-Bāqir (and vicariously, the Prophet) by kissing his head, hands, and, in some accounts, his feet.[13] In each version of this story, Jābir conveys the Prophet's greetings to al-Bāqir, thus further establishing the legitimacy of his imamate and connecting him with the authority of the Prophet. In the process, the audience witnesses the outpouring of the devotee towards his imam through Jābir's physical affection toward al-Bāqir's body.[14]

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[12] On Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr al-Anṣārī, see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, v. 2, 42-43; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī,* v 11, 27-28; Etan Kohlberg, "An Unusual Shīʿī *isnād,*" 142-149; Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth,* 259-260.

[13] *Ithbāt,* 176-7; *Irshād,* II: 158-159 (Eng 394); *Dalāʾil,* 95; *Manāqib,* IV: 212-3; Irbilī, *Kashf,* III:84. In some reports, Jābir lifts his shirt and the shirt of al-Bāqir and presses their stomachs together: Irbilī, *Kashf,* III: 86. On kissing in Sufi literature, see A. Schimmel, "Eros in Sufi Literature and Life," 279-280. Regarding the functions of kissing in religious contexts, see Geoffrey Parrinder, "Touching," ER2; Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane*. Other instances of kissing the bodies of the imams include: ʿAlī kissing the feet of Muḥammad (*al-Irshād,* I: 116 (Eng: 78); *al-Irshād,* II: 321-322 (Eng: 512-513), II: 353 (Eng: 531-2). One may also recall the modern controversy which surrounded the kissing of Ayyatullāh Khomeini's hands at the height of his popularity in Iran.

[14] With regard to the blessings connected with the bodies of the imams, one could also add to this discussion the many instances where the imams magnanimously give to those who come and ask anything from them. This establishes an expectation of bestowal of blessings upon visitation of the body which reasserts itself in the form of *ziyāra.* This will be discussed in chapter four. Concerning al-Bāqir, al-

Love for the imams and their bodies is portrayed and encouraged throughout their biographies. This love is exemplified by the imams' family members and by the imams to one another; it is emulated by their followers; and it is explicitly enjoined by the imams in their teachings. Through the cultivation of love for the imams, believers ensure their own salvation, while those who do not love the imams condemn themselves to the fire. Examples of this abound, but the paradigmatic example is the love found in the "holy family" made up of the first five of the fourteen infallibles: Muḥammad, Fāṭima, ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn. The biographers' put this family's love for each other on prominent display. For the Shiʿa, these five persons make up the core of the *ahl al-bayt,* a critically important concept within Shiʿism and a term that is found in both Sunni and Shiʿi hadith. For the Shiʿa, Muḥammad's love for these members of his family is uniquely intense and serves as a testament to the legitimacy of the imams' claims to authority.[15]

The love within this family goes beyond simply providing a proof for Shiʿi doctrinal claims. It extends to all of the imams, and it is set as an example for people to follow. Imam al-Sajjād says, "Love us, for it is love for Islam. May your love for us never cease even if it becomes a public disgrace."[16] Loving the imams is consistently

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Mufīd records, "[h]e never tired of bestowing generosity on the brethren, and on those who came to visit him, and on those who place their hopes and trust in him" (*al-Irshād,* II: 166-167 (Eng 400)). Cf. al-Kāẓim: *Ithbāt,* 199; *Irshād,* II: 231-235 (Eng 448-450).

[15] Commenting on the centrality of love for this holy family, Clohessy notes, "God accomplishes everything, including the whole of creation, through them. They are the *raison d'être* for everything that God does, and the very salvation of humankind depends upon love for them" (*Fatima,* 72).

[16] *Al-Irshād,* II: 141 (Eng 382).

positioned as a core facet of religious practice.[17] Rewards can be expected for those who fulfill this duty (and not just heavenly rewards); for those who love the imams can call upon them when they are in need. This reciprocal relationship of love and protection is emphasized repeatedly through the way the imams respond to their followers. Al-Mufīd records many stories of Imam al-Bāqir, for instance, giving money to those of his community who were in need. He goes on to say, "[al-Bāqir] never tired of bestowing generosity on the brethren, and on those who came to visit him, and on those who placed their hopes and trust in him."[18] For those who heard these stories about the imams—long after the final imam went into hiding and physical contact was lost—these expectations are reinforced. Even if their love for the imams is "a public disgrace," they can visit them through *ziyāra* (pilgrimage to grave sites) and have faith that their devotion will be rewarded.

Far from simply being an object of male admiration and devotional affection, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, like the other imams, is remembered as doing manly things—i.e., carrying out social performances presumed to be uniquely suited to the male body.[19] In this respect, the imam enshrines cultural expectations of what it means to be a man while concomitantly defending the legitimacy of his claim to be the best of all men and the rightful leader of the community. Sprinkled throughout the biographies of the imams are references to various masculine qualities; attributions of courage, strength, and fearlessness of death, for example, are regularly applied to the imams in passing.[20] It should be noted that these characteristics are not reducible to questions of law or doctrine and thus serve no identifiable purpose beyond demonstrating his excellences in being a "man." More subtle indications appear as well, such as the frequent association and interactions between the imams and lions. Numerous ancient Near Eastern cultures have utilized the image of lion to epitomize idealized forms of masculinity.[21] The incorporation of lions into the narratives is most often in conjunction with the miraculous powers of the imams,[22] as will be discussed in the next section, but the relevance should be remembered here since the regular appearance of lions functionally supports the image of the masculinity of the imams.

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[17] Al-Mufīd lists love for the imams as one of the five pillars of Islam in his *Al Amaali,* 327. In *Iʿlām,* the Prophet says, "God loves whoever loves al-Ḥusayn": 224; Cf. *Irshād,* II: 127 (Eng 374);. See also *Ithbāt,* 134; 143; *al-Irshād*, II: 27-28 (Eng 296); Bursī, *Mashāriq*, 99-102; Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 290-291, 293. Ayoub also discusses this topic: *Redemptive Suffering,* 79; as does Rubin, "Pre-Existence," 66.

[18] *Al-Irshād,* 167 (Eng 400).

[19] Bodily actions are not natural occurrences nor are the performances of the imams inconsequential or devoid of meaning. The manner in which their masculinity is on display within the literature projects specific assumptions and assertions about the imams. On bodily performance, see Marcel Mauss, "Le techniques du corps;" Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, with a new introduction

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(New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Byran Turner, *Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (New York: Blackwell, 1984); Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 11-16.

[20] On al-Bāqir's fearlessness of death, see *Irshād,* II: 161-162 (Eng 396-397); *Manāqib* IV: 217. On the heroism of al-Ḥusayn, see Sindawi, "The Image of Ḥusayn," 95-96.

[21] For lions in early Christian hagiography, see Elliott, *Roads to Paradise,* 144-167, 193-205. On lions in Islamicate literatures, see A. Schimmel, *Islam and the Wonders of Creation: the Animal Kingdom,* (London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1424/2003), 51-52.

[22] See Khalid Sindawi, "The Role of the Lion in Miracles Associated with Shīʿite Imāms," *Der Islam* 84, 2 (2007): 356-390.

Another basic way in which the manliness of the imams is confirmed is through the fathering of children, particularly their male heirs.[23] Each of the imams fulfills this task (apart from the twelfth imam, who went into hiding as young child), which indicates a kind of bodily perfection in which all members are used fully and effectively. It also indicates God's favor, which the imams embody, as well as the fecundity necessary for the task. Furthermore, the imams' sexual vitality is demonstrated by the number of wives and sexual-slave partners which each imam had. Imam al-Bāqir is recorded as fathering children with at least two wives and two slaves, and most imams had at least as many sexual partners.[24]

Interestingly, while all of the imams fathered males who went on to inherit their roles and legacies, the Prophet did not. Each of Muḥammad's natural-born sons (perhaps as many as five in all) died as young children.[25] This has long been a source of reflection for Muslims, as it runs counter to the projection of Muḥammad (like the imams) as a perfect man. Not all of the sources attempt to smooth out this dissonance, but the *Ithbāt* offers a solution: Muḥammad allowed his son to die in order to save his community. According to this account, after Muḥammad's last son, Ibrāhīm, died, the angel Gabriel informs the Prophet that he has a choice. He can either have his son revived, in which case the boy would inherit his father's spiritual leadership but would later be betrayed by the *entire* community and killed (and as a result, all of Muḥammad's followers would find themselves in hell). The other option was to allow his son to die and have his spiritual leadership passed on to al-Ḥusayn, in which case only *half* the community would betray him and kill him. This half of the community would wind up in hell, but the other half, would be saved. Muḥammad chose al-Ḥusayn, saying, "I do not want all of my community to enter hell."[26] Here the Prophet's ability to father a surviving son ceases to be in doubt, and at the same time his alignment with the Shiᶜa is explicit.

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[23] The assumption that an inability to father a male heir is a requirement for an imam is made explicit in an encounter between Imam al-Riḍā and Ibn Qīyāmā where the latter accuses al-Riḍā of not being the real imam since he had not proven himself able to father an heir. Notably, the imam does not disagree with the reasoning presented, but simply promises that he will indeed fulfill this requirement (*Ithbāt,* 217). There were pre-Islamic scholars who articulated the belief that the male sperm determined the sex of a child—such as Lactantius (d. ca. 320): Virginia Burrus, *"Begotten, Not Made": Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 31.

[24] *Irshād,* II: 186 (Eng 406); *Dalāʾil,* 95; *Manāqib,* III: 84-85.

[25] David Powers, *Muḥammad is not the Father of Any of Your Men* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 9.

Numerous narratives place additional, overt displays of masculine accomplishment into the repertoire of the imams. In keeping with images of male leadership across many genres and eras of literature, knowledge of and facility with weaponry were attributed to the imams, helping to create full, robust presentations of them as ideal men. In the longest single narration about al-Bāqir in *Dalāʾil,* the imam goes to Damascus with his son, al-Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq, at the request of the Umayyad caliph, Hishām b. ᶜAbd al-Malik (d. 125/743).[27] The occasion provides the setting for a poignant story in which Imam al-Bāqir embarrasses the caliph with his extraordinary archery skills.[28] In the account, al-Sādiq recalls the event, describing how the Caliph Hishām was "sitting on the throne with his army and chiefs at his feet." An archer's target (*al-burjās*) is set up, and the caliph, who is watching his men practice shooting, orders al-Bāqir to join them. This, says al-Sādiq, was because the caliph "wanted to laugh at my father, thinking that he would come up short and thus miss the target on account of his old age and by this [the caliph could] take out his anger on him." With a proper show of humility and social etiquette, al-Bāqir at first tries to politely decline (*fa-iʿtadhara*), saying "I have grown old and think it better if you excuse me;" but the caliph foolishly misses the chance to save face and insists on putting the imam on the spot. Though the *dénouement* comes as no surprise, the story is entertaining and effective. The caliph shows all the markings of a decidedly emasculated leader:[29] laziness, arrogance, trickery, short-sightedness, lack of hospitality, and, presumably, lack of skill with the bow.[30] The imam displays the opposite of these shortcomings and puts on an admirable performance of manly ideals.[31]

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[26] *Ithbāt,* 165. A different story but one that again has Muḥammad choosing between Ibrāhīm and al-Ḥusayn is found in *Manāqib,* IV: 88-89. This can be contrasted with a narration by Ibn Isḥāq which states that had Ibrahīm lived, he would have been a truthful prophet and freed all of the Coptic slaves: see A. Hidatullah, "Māriyyah the Copt," 237.

[27] He was the tenth Umayyad Caliph—ruled from 105/724 to 125/743. See: Gabrieli, "Hishām," EI^2.

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[28] Other examples of imams displaying their skills with weaponry includes al-Kāẓim coming down from the heavens with a lance (*ḥarba*) made of light (*Dalāʾil,* 156); ʿAlī uses a catapult (*Manāqib,* II: 335).

[29] It is tempting here to suggest the caliph is "feminized" in this portrayal. If the sex/gender system which frames the outlook of the readers has an entirely polarized vision of maleness and femaleness, then would not un-masculine be equal to feminine? I'm not sure. Derek Neal, in *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), suggests this may not be a safe assumption: 250. Perhaps, but, at the very least, trickery (*kayd*) seems to have a decidedly feminine association in the medieval context, which will be discussed more in the next chapter.

[30] There are many examples for comparison where legitimacy/virtue/authenticity is discursively entwined with an attack on an opponent's masculinity. See Jennifer Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual*

After reluctantly accepting a bow (*qaws*) and quiver (*kināna*) from of the soldiers, Imam al-Bāqir takes out an arrow (*sahm*), grabs the middle of the bow (*kibd al-qaws*) and shoots the arrow directly into the middle of the target. The story continues: "Then he shot another [arrow] which split apart the first one down to its arrowhead. Then he continued until he had split nine arrows—they ended up one inside the other." The caliph is unable to contain his frustration, saying, "you are the best archer of all the Arabs and non-Arabs, but you claimed you were old!" Hishām immediately regrets praising the imam, and he tarries for some time before eventually getting up to embrace al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq and praise the father again for his unparalleled skill with the bow. The caliph then asks al-Bāqir where he learned to shoot with such precision, and the imam casually responds that he had practiced for a short time with the people in Medina. The crux of this story, however, is contained in the imam's answer to the caliph's subsequent query as to whether Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq is equally skilled. Al-Bāqir responds, "We inherit perfection, completeness, and religion [*natawāratha al-kamāl wal-tamām wal-dīn*]."[32]

The political relevance of fulfilling standards of masculinity is clear from this narrative. The imams are not only designated by God to lead the community, they are

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Slander and Ancient Christianity (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); ibid., "Enslaved to Demons: Sex, Violence and the Apologies of Justin Martyr," in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses,* edited by Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, 431-455 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[31] *Dalāʾil,* 103-104.

[32] *Dalāʾil,* 104. He goes on to quote a verse of the Qur'an [Sūrat al-māʾida (5): 3].

more capable leaders than the caliphs.[33] Like most antagonists in these stories, the caliph's responses only serve to set up the teaching moment. In this case, the caliph is infuriated by al-Bāqir's claim to a special inheritance, and he objects, saying, "Are we not both children of ʿAbd Manāf? Our descendants and your descendants are the same." The imam replies, "God has specified us for his innermost secrets and his pure knowledge. He has not singled out anyone else except for us." The caliph and the imam, in a scene of symbolic significance, continue their debate on the nature of God's revelation, Muḥammad's mission, and ʿAlī's relationship to them both. Throughout the dialogue, we find the physical and spiritual nature of ʿAlī's (and implicitly the imams') inheritance emphasized. The imam explained to the caliph that Muḥammad had commanded that ʿAlī should

> collect the Qur'an after him and to take care of the [ritual] washing of his deceased body (*ghaslahi*), the embalming (*ṭaḥnīṭahi*), and the wrapping of it (*takfīnahi*)—not anyone else from among his people.[34] For [the Prophet] said to his people and his followers, "It is forbidden for any of you to look upon my genitals (*ʿawratī*) except my brother ʿAlī, for he is from me and I am from him. Whatever is mine is his; and

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[33] Michael Cooperson's obervations (in his discussion of the biographies of Imam al-Riḍá) about the literary function of the caliph in these stories applies here as well. He writes:

> "Structurally, the ṭāʾ*ifa* [faction] of caliphs in Twelver biography serves as the demonic double of the ṭāʾ*ifa* of Imams. The caliphal claim to heirship represents a perversion of the true Alid one, just as oppressive caliphal rule represents a perversion of the imamate. As counterpoints to the Imams, the caliphs serve an important purpose in Twelver biography. Most notably, their persecution of the Imams confirms the rightness of Imami claims" (*Classical Arabic Biography,* 98-99).

[34] On early Muslim burial practices, see Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*.

> whatever is his is mine. He is the judge of my religion, the fulfiller of my promises." And [the Prophet] said, "ʿAlī fights according to the true meaning of the Qur'an (*ta'wīl al-Qurʾān*) just as I fought on the basis of its revelation (*tanzīlihī*).[35]

Eventually, the caliph falls silent, unable to counter the imam's superior arguments. In his embarrassment, he bids the imam to return home. Throughout this story, we see the imams presented as physical—not just spiritual—inheritors from the Prophet. The legitimacy of their claim to authority is displayed through their masculine qualities. Alongside his humility, generosity, and profound wisdom, al-Bāqir was able to prove himself with weaponry, an ability (rife with masculine associations) which he construed as an inheritance. The mandate passed on to ʿAlī, as described in their debate, is framed both in terms of spiritual knowledge (taking care of and interpreting the Qurʾan) and in bodily terms (the sole right to look upon and touch the naked corpse of Muḥammad).[36] The bodies of the two men are equated. The imams have inherited the physical capabilities of the perfect man, Muḥammad, just as they inherited his authority. Disregard for the authority of the imams, therefore, is parallel to a dishonoring of the very body of the Prophet of Islam.

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[35] *Dalāʾil,* 105-106.

[36] This fits with most Shiʿi records, though whether ʿAlī was permitted to look upon the Prophet's genitals was more controversial among Sunnis. The debate over how the Prophet was prepared for burial dramatically overlaps with political controversies (see Madelung, *Succession,* 356-360), disputes over proper Muslim burial rituals, and other social tensions: Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave,* 43-51, 269 n. 8. Al-Mufīd also records an account of Muḥammad asking ʿAlī to wash his body and cover his nakedness: *al-Irshād,* I: 181-182 (Eng: 128). Cf. *Ithbāt,* 125-126; *Iʿlām,* 146-147 (209); *Manāqib,* I: 295-296; Majlisī, *Tārīkh,* 123-124.

Although the imams embody the most basic masculine ideals, there are certain ways in which the biographers nuance their conceptions of masculinity. While normative manly qualities and actions make regular appearance, the overtly macho aspects of masculinity are played down more often than they are emphasized.[37] In addition, the refined, urbane masculinity of the imams, tempered as it is by asceticism, scholarship, and suffering, is quite unlike the elaboration of sexual and military exploits seen in some early descriptions of the Prophet.[38] The teachings of Imam al-Bāqir emphasize the reigning in of physical desires. He is recorded saying that, "the best worship is chastity of the womb and genitals."[39] Chastity, in this context, does not refer to the renunciation of sexual activity, but its strict limitation to legally/morally licit encounters. This overlay of moralism on the imams' bodies provides an image of men in full control of their bodily urges, enjoining others to do the same.[40]

But even greater than control over bodily impulses is cultivation of the intellect: "A scholar is better than seventy-thousand worshippers," says al-Bāqir.[41] The relationship between the imam and the believer is often construed as that of a teacher and student. Imam al-Ṣādiq is recorded saying, "People are [of] three [types]: possessor of knowledge (*ʿālim*), student (*mutaʿallim*), and scum/rubbish (*ghuthaʾ*). We are the knowledgeable (*al-ʿulamā*). Our Shiʿa are the students. The rest of the people are scum."[42] Not only are the imams positioned as the true holders of knowledge (*ʿulamā*), but their followers are the only real students. All of those who fall outside of this relationship are effectively dehumanized and categorically positioned as the "other."[43]

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[37] Cf. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, "Taking it Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 2 (1998): 249-273.

[38] Nimrod Hurvitz, "Biographies and Mild Asceticism: A Study of Islamic Moral Imagination," *Studia Islamica* 85, (1997): 58. The connection between *maghazī* literature and *sīra* literature on the Prophet is closely linked. Consider the number of traditions in Ibn Saᶜd's *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrá* which describe the Prophet's sexual prowess: discussed by Roded, "Alternate Images," 57-71.

[39] Al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuhaf al-ᶜuqūl,* 351; Irbilī, *Kashf,* III: 81.

[40] Generally speaking, the characteristics of "mild asceticism," as described by Hurvitz, apply to most of the descriptions of the imams. See Hurvitz, "Biographies and Mild Asceticism."

[41] Al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuhaf al-Uqoul: The Masterpieces of the Intellects*, translated by Badr Shahin (Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2001), 347; Irbilī, *Kashf,* III: 109-110. One of the qualifications of an imam is that he is

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superior in knowledge to all other candidates for the office. Al-Mufīd discusses this in relation to al-Bāqir (*al-Irshād,* II: 157-158 (393-394)), among other places.

[42] *Iʿlām,* 287.

[43] This tri-partite division of people into three categories—infallibles, followers, and sub-humans—as it is found in Shiʿi literature in general, is discussed by M. A. Amir-Moezzi, "Seul l'homme de Dieu est humain: Theologie et anthropologie mystique à travers l'exégèse imamite ancienne (aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine iv)," *Arabica* 45, 2 (1998), 193-214; translated in *Sprirituality*, 277-304. Roy Vilozny's study of al-Barqī's (d. 274/888 or 280/894) *al-Maḥāsin* suggests a two-fold division of humanity may have been a common Shiʿi perspective in the 8th and 9th centuries, where the followers are generally grouped with the infallibles in the general category of the Shiʿa/saved/human and the other category was occupied by the non-Shiʿa/damned/sub-human: "A Šīʿī Life Cycle According to al-Barqī's *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin,*" *Arabica* 54, 3 (2007), 362-396, especially 393. Amir-Moezzi also has some comments on this two-fold division of humanity, where the believer and imam share ontological similarities: *Spirituality,* 210-212—judging from his citations, the possibility that this was an earlier Shiʿi perspective is supported. It does seem that the collective biographies of the imams reflect and reinforce an idea of the imams as representing a distinct category of being, whereas the more juridical-minded collections of *ḥadīth* do not. In the biographies, the idealization of the imams is more devotionally oriented, whereas in a legally-focused work like *al-Maḥāsin,* there is a more practical interest in imitating the imams. Furthermore, the tri-partite emphasis may partly be a response to the dilemma Vilozny discovers within *al-Maḥāsin*—how to make sense of those Shiʿi members of the community who do not live up to the expectations of the community. By separating the followers of the infallibles from the infallibles themselves, greater space is provided for coming to terms with the Shiʿi Muslim who commits major sins.

According to the biographies, the teachings of the imams go largely unheeded by the greater Muslim community, however, and are actively suppressed by enemies who succeed in leading many people astray. This burden of a lost community not only weighs heavily on imams' minds, but on their bodies. They regularly endure the persecution, ridicule, and rejection;[44] and ultimately, they all die martyrs' deaths.[45] A pattern of loss and suffering is established which will be discussed more in chapters four and five, but it deserves mention here for its contribution to the virtues the imams embody. Despite their strength of spirit, wealth of knowledge, and physical wholeness—all of which are part of their inheritance (*waṣīya*)—the imams' bodies are vulnerable. Shiᶜism is a story of loss, and the imams embody that story. Al-Bāqir comments in this vein, as recorded in *al-Irshād*: "The people cause us great trouble. We summon them but they do not answer us. If we abandoned them, they would be guided by no one."[46]

The attributes that mitigate the aggressive aspects of masculinity are not unique to the imams or their biographers' vision of masculinity. For example, the theme of grief (*ḥuzn*) that appears in Shiᶜi sources was simultaneously cultivated among some sufis groups, and would be even more so in subsequent centuries. But the imams' image, when taken as a composite whole, emerges as unique, becoming the standard against which other men are measured. Some men may act like ascetics, but imams give everything they have to those who love them. Some may pretend to be scholars, but the imams have true knowledge to share. Some feign grief, but the imams endure the greatest trials at the hands of the enemies. Some may think themselves men, but their masculinity pales in comparison to that of the imams. It is a powerful image, which the biographers present through their narratives.

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[44] This will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter four. For an example, however, see Shona Wardrop's dissertation on the imams al-Jawād and al-Hādī where this theme is shown to be pervasive: "The Lives."

[45] See chapter five.

[46] *Al-Irshād,* II: 167-168 (Eng 401).

This analysis reveals levels of rhetoric in the imams' biographies that relate directly to the concerns of the community remembering these stories as well as to the rivalries that threatened the biographers.[47] Warriors, scholars, and sufis (not mutually exclusive categories, of course) spoke with diverse voices within the larger community, each reflecting their own concerns. In a similar vein, the sense which one gets from these biographies—and which is presumably echoed by the significant number of the Shiʿa who received and passed on these stories and books—is that of alienation and outsiderness. The biographers appear to be reacting to various forms of persecution by embracing a distinctive identity and drawing a rigid line around themselves—reducing all others to a single "enemy." Although they occasionally display the latent potential of the imams as leaders and warriors, the mood of their works is far from triumphant.[48]

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[47] It is not at all uncommon for biographies to reflect the circumstances and perspectives of the author. Hurvitz has discussed possibility of reading biographies in this way and has shown the fruit of such a reading through the biographies of Ibn Ḥanbal and the Prophet Muḥammad: "Biographies and Mild Asceticism."

[48] To some extent Muḥammad and ʿAlī do not fit this generalization, since they both are recorded fighting numerous successful battles. But even in this case, that aspect of their lives is not particularly emphasized.

There is no optimism such as one might find in early biographies of the Prophet, reflecting a community which has conquered far-reaching lands (or expects to do so anytime soon); instead, there is a looming disappointment portrayed through the unfulfilled potentiality of the imams' bodies. It seems fair to say, in this regard, that the ideal man, as exemplified by the imams, resembles the writers who wrote about them: capable, urbane men of letters who know life-giving secrets but who are prevented from taking on full leadership of a community dominated by their adversaries.

III.B. Power over the Body: The Miracles of Imam al-Kāẓim

The array of miracles attributed to the imams is one of the few aspects of the biographies which has garnered attention in western scholarship.[49] Though the different authors of the collective biographies placed varying degrees of emphasis on the miraculous events of the imams' lives, each of the works this study examines fully embraces the notion that all of the imams performed miracles.[50] The biographies of the imams are saturated in the miraculous. Descriptions of supernatural occurrences frequently extend well beyond the sections devoted to miracles which several of the authors delimited; this is illustrated by many of the stories previously mentioned. The nature, meaning, and function of miracle accounts of the imams warrant specific attention.[51] Using the narratives of the seventh imam, Mūsá b. Jaʿfar al-Kāẓim, as a reference point, I here consider the ways the imams transcend their bodily limitations and reveal their true nature to the community of believers.[52]

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[49] See Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide,* 91-97; Kohlberg, "Vision and the Imams," in *Autour du regard: Mélanges Gimaret,* eds. É. Chaumont, with the assistance of D. Aigle, M. A. Amir-Moezzi, and P. Lory (Paris: Peeters, 2003), 125-157; Lobenstein, "Miracles in Šīʿī Thought: A Case-Study of the Miracles Attributed to Imām Gaʿfar al-Ṣādiq," *Arabica* 50, 2 (2003), 199-244; Sindawi, "The Role of the Lion," 356-390; Khalid Sindawi, "The Sea in the Miracles of Šīʿite Imams," *Oriente Moderno* 89, 2 (2009), 445-471; Amir-Moezzi, *Spirituality,* passim.

[50] It should be noted that the Shiʿa have not typically emphasized the differences between prophetic miracles (*muʿjiza*) and non-prophetic miracles (*karāma*). The division which Sunni thinkers have often insisted upon between these two categories points to the purpose of each miracle type rather than any substantive differences between the two. For the Shiʿa, the imams' miracles function similarly to prophetic miracles in that they verify and authenticate their divinely-appointed office. The term *karāma* does not often appear in Shiʿi writings, and the imams' miracles are typically discussed in terms of

The dazzling array of miracles attributed to the imams in the biographies makes it difficult to chart them into a simple typology.[53] Yet there are a few identifiable

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muʿjiza or *kharq al-ʿāda* ("extraordinary"—a term which can refer to any type of miracle). See A. J. Wensinck, "Muʿdjiza," EI^2; L. Gardet, "Karāma," EI^2; McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufid,* 83-84, 112-114; Lobenstein, "Miracles," 202-211; Renard, *Friends of God,* 91-98; David Thomas, "Miracles in Islam," in *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles,* ed. Graham H. Twelftree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 199-215.

[51] Developing a universal function for miracle stories—like stories in general—is a fraught endeavor. Arie Schippers has demonstrated, for instance, the limited utility of Claude Bremond's theories which he thought could apply to all miracle stories (Arie Schippers, "'Tales with a Good Ending' in Arabic Literature: Narrative Art and Theory of the Arabic World," *Quaderni Di Studi Arabi* 4, (1986), 57-70). The point of this section is not to suggest a comprehensive paradigm through which all miracle accounts of the imams can be read, but instead to point out dominant patterns that can be identified.

[52] It should again be emphasized here that the focus on Imam al-Kāẓim in this section is not related to any particular connection between his imamate and miracles. In fact, the imams with the largest number of miracle attributions are the first (ʿAlī) and the sixth (al-Ṣādiq): Amir-Moezzi, "Savoir," 258-9 (in *Spirituality,* 203-204). Mūsá al-Kāẓim will be the primary example in part to demonstrate just how pervasive the miracle accounts are for all of the imams. My research in this section has confirmed the suggestion made by Lobenstein that all of the imams appear to have similar types of miracle accounts: "Miracles in Šīʿī Thought," 242.

[53] Sindawi separates al-Ḥusayn's miracles in *maqātil* literature into (a) those of salvation/deliverance, (b) punishment, (c) those which take some time to happen ("Image of Ḥusayn," 96-100).

categories of miracles that continually reappear in the biographies of all twelve imams. Among the most frequently recurring are miracles related (1) to speech, and (2) to vision. These two themes encompass a large number—if not the majority—of the miracles of the imams. In each case, we find that the miracles reflect the biographers' concern about the imams' physical vulnerabilities and the nature of their authority. Similar to the birth accounts discussed in the last chapter, the miracle accounts deepen the connection between the imams and stories of the prophets. Furthermore, the accounts reflect an uneasiness about the vulnerabilities of the communal body of believers and their status in cosmic history.

I discuss in chapter two the role of speech in stories about the imams' infancies,[54] but another distinctive feature of the imams' speech, repeated by each biographer, is their knowledge of all human languages. In some instances, the biographer specifies the number of languages known by an imam—for example, al-Ṭabrisī asserts that al-Hādī knew seventy-three languages.[55] In addition, the biographers often include stories that showcase this linguistic prowess. Ibn Shahrāshūb records Abū Baṣīr's account of asking Imam al-Kāẓim how one recognizes the real imam. Al-Kāẓim responds by listing some of the criteria for an imam, including designation from the father, an ability to answer any question, knowledge of coming events, and by speaking to people in all languages. Abū Baṣīr's account goes on:

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[54] To add to those accounts listed in chapter two, we can mention here the infant speech of Imam al-Kāẓim. In a particularly interesting narration, the infant Imam al-Kāẓim speaks from the cradle to one of the Shiʿa who came to visit him after his birth, instructing that person to change the name of his recently born daughter. The daughter had apparently been given the name al-Ḥumayra, a name by which ʿĀʾisha bt. Abī Bakr was known: *al-Irshād,* II: 219 (439); *Dalāʾil,* 159; *Manāqib,* IV: 312. The antipathy toward ʿĀʾisha is palpable, and the biographies display here their own aggressive attempt to control cultural memory in relationship to their grievances On the uneasy relationship between the Shiʿa and the beloved wife of the Prophet, see Denise Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of ʿAʾisha bin Abi Bakr* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[55] *Iʿlām,* 356; also *al-Manāqib* 4:440. The number seventy-three is suggestive of the various Muslim communities of the world (which in a popular *ḥadīth* of the Prophet was said to number seventy-three). Al-Bursī says Muḥammad knew 70,000: *Mashāriq,* 63.

> Then [the imam] said, "Abū Muḥammad [Abū Baṣīr], I will provide a sign for you before you get up [to leave]." And shortly thereafter a man from Khurāsān approached [the imam]. The man spoke to [the imam] in Arabic but Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Kāẓim] answered him in Persian. Then the Khurāsānī said, "The only thing that kept me from speaking to you in Persian was that I thought you did not know it well." [The imam] replied, "Praise God. If I did not speak well enough to answer you then I would not have any superiority over you which is a requirement of the imamate." Then [the imam] said, "Abū Muḥammad [Abū Baṣīr], the speech of no one is hidden from the imam, nor the speech of birds (*manṭiq al-ṭayr*),[56] nor the speech of anything which has a spirit (*rūḥ*).[57]

As seen here, the omni-lingual capability of the imam acts as an explicit proof of his uniquely superior status—and as such, implicit proof of his right to the political/religious authority of the imamate. As an intellectual power, his knowledge of languages highlights his superiority over those who presume to possess elite religious knowledge: jurists, theologians, philosophers, etc. The function of these narratives, however, is not limited to apologetics. Knowing that the imams were conversant in all languages facilitated the intercessory role of the imams in Shiᶜi religious life and assured many Muslims across the centuries that they could pray directly to the imams in their own language. Emphasis on language capabilities was congruent with—and perhaps influential upon—the ongoing popularization of Shiᶜism outside of ᶜArab circles in the 10th to 12th centuries.

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[56] The idea of talking to birds is particularly prominent in Islamicate literatures. The phrase, "speech of the birds" (*manṭiq al-ṭayr*) is found in the Qurʾān (27:16, see discussion of Solomon below) and famously used as a mystical allegory in ʿAṭṭār's Persian classic, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (*Conference of the Birds*). On the topic of birds in relationship to the imams, see Khalid Sindawi, "The Role of Birds in Shiʿite Thought," *Quaderni* 3, (2008), 165-181. Examples of al-Kāẓim speaking with birds includes *Al-Irshād,* II: 225 (444); *Dalāʿil,* 168, 170; *Manāqib,* IV: 329. See also a discussion of it attributed to al-Bāqir: *Manāqib,* IV: 211.

[57] *Manāqib,* IV: 323. Also in *Ithbāt,* 199; *al-Irshād,* II: 224-225 (443-4), *Dala'il,* 166-167; *Iʿlām,* 305-306. In another case, a follower recalls watching al-Kazim speak to a group of thirty Abyssinian slaves in their language: *Dalāʾil,* 167.

The quote above also clarifies that the imams' linguistic abilities are not limited to human languages—they are repeatedly shown to be able to communicate with animals, *jinn*,[58] and, occasionally, inanimate objects.[59] This was within the realm of what the Shiᶜi community might reasonably expect to hear about the imams, for conversing with animals was a common motif in stories about pre-Islamic prophets and some later sufi saints.[60] The Qur'anic account of Solomon is particularly important, for in *Sūrat al-naml* the Prophet Solomon claims to have been taught the speech of birds.[61] Other

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[58] *Dalāʾil* records al-Bāqir talking to jinn (100-101).

[59] Al-Mufīd records al-Kāẓim talking to a tree: *al-Irshād,* II: 224 (443). Al-Bāqir is recorded speaking to milk and a stick: *Dalāʾil,* 95-6.

[60] References to prophets and sufi saints talking to animals: Renard, *Friends of God,* 110-112. Cf. Elliott, *Roads to Paradise,* 193-204.

[61] *Sūrat al-naml* (27): 16-19:

> Solomon succeeded David. He said, 'People, we have been taught the speech of birds, and we have been given a share of everything: this is clearly a great favour.' Solomon's hosts of jinn, men, and birds were marshaled in ordered ranks before him, and when they came to the Valley of the Ants, one ant said, 'Ants! Go into your homes, in case

prophets were also said known to have communicated with animals; and thus we find among the Shiʿa an assumption that the imams would be able to do the same.[62] Each of the imams' biographers has accounts that testify to this capability. Al-Kāẓim speaks with cows,[63] lions,[64] and birds,[65] for example. The exchanges between imam and animal

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> Solomon and his hosts unwittingly crush you.' Solomon smiled broadly at her words... (tr. Abdel Haleem).

[62] The connection between the imams' miracles and those of previous prophets has been noted by other scholars as well. Sindawi writes, "The Ŝīʿites miss no opportunity to compare the prophets and the imams in this respect" ("The Sea," 455, and there are examples which illustrate this throughout). Likewise, Lobenstein notes,

> One of the striking patterns in these traditions is the link between al-Ṣādiq and characters mentioned in the Qurʾān. This link is created in several ways, one of which is the comparison of a miracle performed by al-Sadiq with a miracle mentioned in the Qur'an. Thus al-Sadiq's deeds are compared to the sunna of Maryam, Mūsá and Sulaymān. The use of the word *sunna* raises the association of *sunnat al-nabi*, thus implying that the Imams, like the Prophet, also have a defined *sunna* which is characterized, among other things, by the routine performance of miracles. This subtle and associative comparison treads the thin line which differentiates between the concepts of prophecy and Imamate in Imamī thought. The tension between these two concepts, which stems from the Imamiyya's wish to elevate the Imams' status without undermining that of the Prophet, comes to light in such allusions which recur throughout the traditions dealing with the Imams' miracles ("Miracles," 241-242).

See also, Kohlberg, "Vision," 125-127; Khalid Sindawi, "The Donkey of the Prophet in the Shīʿite Tradition," *al-Masāq* 18, 1 (2006), 87-98, especially, 97-98.

[63] *Al-Irshād,* II: 219 (439).

[64] *Al-Irshād,* II: 229-230 (447); two stories in *al-Manaqib,* IV: 323-324.

[65] *Al-Irshād,* II: 225 (444); *Dalāʾil,* 168; ibid., 170; *Manāqib,* IV: 329. See also, Sindawi, "The Role of Birds," 165-181. Al-Bāqir speaks with birds (*Ithbāt,* 177; *Dalāʾil,* 98), as does al-Hādī (*Dalāʾil,* 214), [*and many other instances could be culled*].

are often quite personal in content, such as when a lion comes to al-Kāẓim in hopes that the imam would pray for his partner who was experiencing great difficulty during childbirth (a request the imam obliged).[66] Such stories emphasize the full authority of the imams—which, though hidden to many humans, is apparent to the animal kingdom. The range of animals we find across the biographies is fascinating and suggests a desire on the part of the biographers to amaze and entertain (alongside their other goals).[67] In addition to the above mentioned animals, the biographies of other imams include conversations with wolves,[68] sheep,[69] geese,[70] donkeys,[71] fish,[72] and geckos,[73] to name but a few.[74] But consistent with other themes, the imams' proficiency with languages highlights their intellectual capabilities and general charisma, ultimately confirming that these are no ordinary men.

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[66] *Al-Irshād,* II: 229-230 (447); *al-Manaqib,* IV: 323. Further comments on the significance of lions are made below.

[67] One category of stories which must have provoked much amusement were those which tell of the imams turning people into animals (typically as a punishment) and/or back into humans. See Kohlberg, "Vision," 143-146.

[68] *Dalāʾil* 98-99: al-Bāqir.

[69] *Ithbāt*, 177: al-Bāqir.

[70] *Al-Irshad,* I: 17 (10): ʿAlī.

[71] *Ithbāt,* 180: al-Bāqir. For many more references to donkeys, see Sindawi, "The Donkey," *passim.*

[72] *Al-Irshād,* I: 347-348 (Eng: 263): ʿAlī. In this narrative, many of the fish speak to the imam, but a few remain silent. It turns out that the ones who do not speak to the imam are the ritually impure fish (eels and other scale-less fish (*marmāliq*)).

[73] *Dalā'il,* 98-99: al-Bāqir.

[74] A comprehensive study of the recorded interactions of the imams with animals would be a worthwhile project. In addition to the value it would provide toward our understanding of animal imagery used in medieval Muslim literatures, it may also provide insight into social history. The imam-animal dialogues often address personal or familial problems which an animal takes to an imam for advice or help. The counseling provided by the imams in these cases seem to be framed to reflect the problems human

These performances by the imams serve functions beyond proving their imamate. The conversations with animals are notable in that they alert the audience to the cosmic order in which the imams fit, and the stories invite the community to align themselves with that order by recognizing the absolute authority of the imams. The animals are typically cognizant of the imams' powers and authority, often coming to an imam for that very reason. In only a small minority of cases is the animal an enemy of the imam.[75] Through the imams' interactions with animals, the potential for the imams to function as effective leaders is again put on display. As such, an alternate storyworld is glimpsed through these encounters, though they remain largely outside of the audience's view.[76] It is clear, however, that the imams have widely recognized power and authority within that world. In this sense, the animal narratives reflect a reality that the Shiʿi community imagines its own situation *ought* to resemble, though it does not.[77] By contrast with this more ideal storyworld, the unnatural and ungodly

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followers of the imams had and thus may give insight into popular conceptions of family relations, gender, and general social life.

[75] See Sindawi, "Role of Birds," 169. Or consider the instance where al-Kāẓim feeds a poisoned date to the caliph's dog. Thus the animal world is not a utopia, but a place where the followers of the imams are the majority and the enemies are a minority—the opposite of the world in which the Shiʿa live. Cf. *Dalāʾil,* 170.

[76] That is to say that the storyworld of the animal kingdom does not receive an in-depth or systematic treatment, but it s a world that is presumed to have its own narrative, and the imams are occasionally seen engaging that world.

[77] Consider, for example, Ibn Shahrāshūb's description of the all the animals of the land and sea mourning the death of Imam al-Husayn: *Manaqib* IV: 94. Also, numerous accounts have Imam 'Ali

corruption of cosmic order which prevails in the corporeal world is exposed all the more clearly.

Another dominant theme of the miracle stories is the imams' preternatural ability to see the unseen and to give sight to others.[78] The imams can see the in the dark and through walls,[79] they can view far off lands,[80] discern people's thoughts,[81] perceive the future,[82] see deceased ancestors, view heaven and hell,[83] and behold other unseen

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explaining that a group of geese were grieving his death: *al-Irshad,* I: 17, 319-320 (10, 241-242): *Iʿlām,* 169; *Manāqib,* III: 356. See also the roles which Sindawi has identified for birds in stories about the imams in "The Role of Birds," including grieving for the plight of the Shiʿa (168-169), expressing their love for the Shiʿa (170), showing sympathy for the imams and their followers (170-171), giving food and drink to people for the sake of the Prophet's family (171); cursing the murderers of al-Ḥusayn (173-174); mourning (174-176)—all of these could be described as important rituals which sustain the Shiʿi community. An example of this can be found in *Manāqib* IV: 211. We could perhaps include the ram that kills one of the people who hurt the Prophet (*Iʿlām,* 98-99, Eng: 129).

[78] An excellent discussion of this topic, with regard to Shiʿi literature in general, is provided by Kohlberg, "Vision and the Imams," 125-157. Cf. Renard, *Friends of God,* 112-115. Some specific examples in the case of al-Ṣādiq are listed in Loebenstein, "Miracles," 240.

[79] A story of al-Ṣādiq records him rebuking a person for grabbing the breast of one of his slaves while he was away: *Dalāʾil,* 115. The same or a similar story is also told of al-Bāqir: Kohlberg, "Vision," 129.

[80] Imams are given a light by which they can see the world in all places, and actions (Kohlberg, "Vision" 125-6—cites *Basa'ir,* Majlisi, Khasibi's *Hidayat*)—related to Abraham through Sūrat al-anʿām (6): 75.

[81] Al-Bāqir answered the questions of a person before they are asked in *Ithbāt,* 108-109; *Dalāʾil,* 108-109. *Iʿlām* describes al-Ṣādiq performing a similar feat (278-279). Al-Kāẓim does the same: *Dalāʾil,* 157. Al-ʿAskarī: *al-Irshād,* II: 331 (520).

[82] ʿAlī has knowledge of events yet to come in his life, death, and the situation of his descendants: *Iʿlām,* 179-184. Al-Bāqir foresees the destruction of a building: *Dalāʾil,* 109; predicts the fate of Zayd b. ʿAlī: *Ithbāt,* 177, 183. Al-Kāẓim: *Ithbāt,* 197; *al-Irshād,* II: 224-225 (443); *Dalāʾil,* 163-164; *Manāqib,* IV: 327-328.

[83] Al-Sajjād takes a trip up to heaven (for references this story, see Amir-Moezzi, "Knowledge," 209). And al-Hādī appears to escort a friend to heaven personally: *al-Irshād,* II: 311 (Eng: 506); though this may simply be a vision of heaven.

events taking place in (or simply symbolic of) the spiritual world.[84] The imams also demonstrate the ability to enable others to see things that they otherwise could not. This comes in the form of physical healing of the blind,[85] as well as providing spiritual visions to those who need or request guidance.[86] Obstructing the vision of others—namely the enemies of the Shiᶜa—is also within the imams' thaumaturgical capabilities. In this vein, al-Kāẓim once made himself invisible to the ill-intentioned Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.[87]

In particularly striking imagery, imams enable select people to have mystical visions, thereby emphasizing (for the audience) the role of the imams as guides and impressing upon the faithful the importance of remaining near to them. The *Ithbāt* records a story from Dāwud al-Riqqī who asks Imam al-Ṣādiq about the day of resurrection (*al-qawm*). The imam asks Dāwud whether he prefers to hear a *ḥadīth* on the matter or to have a visual experience of the issue. When Dāwud requests to *see* the matter, al-Ṣādiq instructs his son, Imam al-Kāẓim, to fetch the rod (*al-qaḍīb*).[88] Dāwud recalls the vision he was given when al-Kāẓim returns with the rod and at his father's command,

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[84] Intentionally, I have grouped together physical sight, spiritual sight, mystical visions, and the power of foresight; for they frequently overlap in meaning within the stories themselves, and they are regularly described in ocular terms. Another example of this ambiguity is present when al-Ṣādiq appears to see/perceive/know the ritual impurity of one of his followers: *al-Irshād,* II: 185 (Eng: 413).

[85] See Kohlberg, "Vision," 149.

[86] Al-Bāqir can show people visions of the unseen: *Ithbāt,* 179-180; *Manāqib* IV: 199-200. We should also recall from chapter two the accounts of various forms of light which people witness in the imams, especially at their births.

[87] For references, see Moezzi, *Spirituality,* 207; Kohlberg, "Vision," 132.

[88] This is the rod of Moses (made explicit in other narratives) which is one of the items inherited by the imams, passed down between them, and remains today with al-Mahdī. In a miracle attributed to Imam

> ...struck the ground with it [causing] such a blow that a black sea burst forth. Then he struck the sea with the rod and [the water] was divided by a black rock. Then he struck the rock and a door opened up into it. And there was a group of people crammed together. Their faces were rough and their eyes were blue (*mazraqa*). And each one of them was tightly tied to the rock. And there was an angel in charge of each one of them. They [the people] would cry out, "Oh, Muḥammad!" But the angels of hell (*al-zabānīya*) would strike their faces and say to them, "You have lied! Muḥammad is not with you and you are not with him!" Then I said to [Imam al-Kāẓim]: "May I be your servant. Who are they?" He said to me, "They are al-Jibt and al-Ṭāghūt.[89] They are filth. They are the cursed son of the devil (*al-laᶜīn ibn al-laᶜīn*). They will always be known by their names, from their first to their last, including the people of Saqīfa,[90] the sons of al-Azraq,[91] and the groups of people from the descendants of Abū Sufyān and Marwān.[92] God renews the punishment upon them each day."
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> Then [the imam] said to the rock, "Be closed upon them until the known time."[93]

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al-Bāqir, the imam strikes the rod of Moses against a rock to draw water from it: *Dala'il,* 97—clearly mirroring the famous story of Moses in the Hebrew Bible (Numbers 20:1-13) which has featured prominently in Christian literature as well. Note also that al-Sharif al-Radi uses *qadib* and mantle (*burud*) as symbols of the Prophet's authority (see quote by Stetkevych's article on Radi's Poetics, 295-296).

[89] On Jibt and Ṭāghūt, see Maria Dakake, "Hiding in Plain Sight: The Practical and Doctrinal Significance of Secrecy in Shi'ite Islam," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2006): 344-345. Cf. *Sūrat al-nisāʾ* (4): 51.

[90] This is a reference to those who met at Saqīfa Banī Sāᶜida to choose Muḥammad successor while ᶜAlī was away. This will be discussed further in chapter four, but for general references, see: G. Lecomte, "Saḳīfa," EI^2; Madelung, *Succession,* 28-45.

[91] Note on Nāfiʾ b. al-Azraq and the Azāriqa Kharijite group. See Keith Lewinstein, "Azāriqa," EI^3.

[92] Note on Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, and the Umayyads.

[93] *Ithbāt,* 195-196.

This story displays the deep anger and vindictive sentiments which resonate in the Shiᶜi community toward their persecutors. It is not incidental that the consolation offered through this story is a vow to *remember* the perpetrators' names, not erase them from history. The imam assures Dāwud that the identity of these gross offenders of God's plan will not be forgotten. Their sins against God, God's Prophet and the Prophet's family will be met with justice.

Through miracles, the imams demonstrate their care for their followers. This is another important aspect of many of these accounts, and particularly of the miracles related to the imams' ability to foresee the future. They take care of the Shiᶜa and protect them against those who would bring harm to them. For example, the rescue of ᶜAlī b. Yaqṭīn by Imam al-Kāẓim is recorded in several sources. In one story, ᶜAlī b. Yaqṭīn is given a beautiful robe by the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. As a follower of the imam, ᶜAlī decides to donate the expensive item to his imam. But al-Kāẓim, using his power of premonition, warns ᶜAlī that he will need the item and that he should keep it for now. Later, one of the caliph's informants who knew of ᶜAlī's intention to donate the item to the imam attempts to betray ᶜAlī and have him punished. When the caliph is told that ᶜAlī had given his gift to Imam al-Kāẓim, the ruler furiously questions ᶜAlī about the robe. When ᶜAlī is able to prove that he had not given it to the imam by bringing it forward to show the caliph, the latter's anger subsides, and ᶜAlī is safe once again. The informant, however, is given a hundred lashes and dies.[94] Many stories like this are among the miracle accounts, and they cultivate the faith of those who rely on the imams for guidance and protection, while guaranteeing that the Shiʿa will ultimately prevail.

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[94] *Al-Irshād,* II: 225-227 (444-445); *Dalāʾil,* 156-157; *Iᶜlām,* 304. For similar accounts, compare another story involving al-Kāẓim and ᶜAlī b. Yaqṭīn (*al-Irshād,* II: 227-230, (445-447); *Iᶜlām,* 304-305).

Both the miracles related to speech and those related to vision inculcate in the audience an understanding of the imams as loci of divine knowledge (*ʿilm*).[95] The lack of temporal authority attained by the historical imams is offset by clear demonstrations of their superior embodiment of *ʿilm*. Their speech and their vision are constant witnesses to this fact. Knowledge is the most regularly referenced proof of the authority of each imam—and the stories often pit the imams against known scholars of their day. Key representatives of each of the Sunni schools appear in the biographies of the imams, affording the Shiʿa opportunities to exploit the historical personas of the esteemed Sunni jurists for the greater glory of the imams.[96]

Returning to the issue at the foreground of this chapter, we see that the miracle accounts offer great insight into how the body was understood by the community. The imams, though inheritors of perfect male bodies with full potential for—and a moral right to—leadership, are regularly victims of ridicule and imprisonment. Their physical potential is, in many ways, thwarted by the actions of others on their bodies. Some of the imams had scarcely any followers, and the biographies regularly allude to the widespread doubts and confusion regarding the imamate,[97] as well as the active attempts of the ruling authorities to terrorize the followers of the imams.[98] We have already seen how this tension influenced the idealization of manliness. Here, we find that cultivation of mystery, miracles, and knowledge of the unseen was another way in which the pain and suffering of the imams was shaped into an intelligible and memorable narrative by their biographers. The imams are subjected to ridicule, betrayal, and persecution from a variety of directions, but they transcend these bodily abuses. Normal believers do not naturally comprehend the way in which the imams are connected with the unseen spiritual world, and it is only through the super-natural actions of the imams (i.e.- their miracles) that the community "sees" reality more fully.

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[95] Lobenstein chose to mark of knowledge-related miracles as one of the categories of al-Ṣādiq's miracles. The other categories used by Lobenstein were those which concerned life and death and those which were nature-related. See Lobenstein, "Miracles in Shīʿī Thought." This highlights the abovementioned difficulty of typlogizing the imams' miracles. In this section, however, I follow Amir-Moezzi's lead in seeing knowledge as a critical aspect of most all of the miracle accounts. See Amir-Moezzi, Divine Guide, 69-79; ibid., "Knowledge," esp. 199-200.

[96] As a child, al-Kāẓim is shown to be superior to Abū Ḥanīfa (*Ithbāt,* 191-192; *Dalāʾil,* 159), the eponymous founder of the Ḥanafī school of law. Al-Mufid records that al-Kāẓim invalidated the teachings of the jurists of Medina: *al-Irshād,* II: 223 (Eng: 443). Al-Ṣādiq said: "We are the interpreters (*tarājima*) of God's revelation; we are the reservoir of God's knowledge; we are the infallibles. God has commanded obedience to us and forbidden disobedience. We are the profound proof (*al-ḥujja al-bāligha*) for everyone between heaven and earth" (*Iʿlām,* 287).

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[97] See Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation,* 3-105.

[98] This fear and uncertainty surrounding the imams' followers is precisely the context in which many of the miracles are performed. The miracles help ease fears and erase uncertainty through their clear message, while also condemning the unjust leaders. In one famous account, Hishām b. Sālim (on him, see Khalid Sindawi, "Hishām b. Sālim al-Jawālīqī and His Role in Shīʿī Thought in the Second Century AH," *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 48, (2011), 260-77) tells of his despair after the death of Imam al-Ṣādiq (al-Kāẓim's father) since he did not know the identity of the next imam. Weeping in the streets he contemplated joining other Muslim groups, such as the Muʿtazilis or the Zaydis. But at this critical moment a man appeared to him in the street and motioned for him to follow. Though fearful that he was a spy for the caliph, he followed the man. Hishām was lead to the house of MūsĀ al-Kāẓim who was already aware of the man's doubts and concerns. Al-Kāẓim was able to answer all of the man's questions in such a way that proved he was the imam, but al-Kāẓim cautioned him to not tell people about him, lest there be a mass killing of them all. Of course, Hishām could not contain his joy and quickly spread the word. See *Ithbāt,* 197-198; *al-Irshād,* II: 221-223 (440-442); *Dalāʾil,* 157; *Iʿlām,* 302-303. Also see the fear which underlines the two stories of ʿAlī b. Yaqtin: *al-Irshād,* II: 225-230 (444-447); *Dalāʾil,* 156-157; *Iʿlām,* 304-305. The student being unable to keep the master's identity secret is very reminiscent of several accounts in the Christian gospels, e.g.- Matthew 16:20.

In this way, the miracle accounts demonstrate a critical facet of the irony of the imams' unfulfilled authority as it relates to the body: the stories of the imams are located within a narrative that does not allow the hero to win the critical battle physically. The ideal objective of leading and guiding the Muslim community was effectively thwarted, thus provoking an even more dynamic memory of the imams among their followers which could incorporate this reality into the larger conception of the imamate.[99] The miracle accounts open the eyes of the audience to the meta-narrative wherein the imams are in complete control of their fate and where physical impediments highlight their spiritual transcendence.[100] Their biographers move the locus of their power from their bodies to their spirits, effectively redefining the nature of the core struggle against their enemies and thereby placing their struggles in a framework where their victory is imminent. The story of the imams, as we saw in the last chapter, begins long before their births, and their essence is defined by a pure light passed on from time immemorial. We have seen here that the imams know the languages of all humankind and are able to lead everyone willing to follow. Even the animal kingdom is aware of their spiritual powers, and the animals are regularly portrayed as servants and helpers to the imams, just as they had been to the prophets before them. And the greatest figure in the animal kingdom, the lion, is particularly prominent in this regard. This strong and majestic animal, full of masculine connotations, shows himself to be a servant of the imam.[101] The vision of the imams extends beyond their temporal and geographical confines and even penetrates the immaterial world.

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[99] Why does the passive, almost fatalistic, attitude of the imams (many of them, at least) toward the rulers, the rulers' abuse of power, and the lack of hope for establishing a just government make sense within this literature? Regardless of historical occurrences, pessimism about the possibility of correcting the historical trajectory was clearly a pervasive mood among many of the Shiʿa: the world is drowning. The Shiʿa are to be saved from this ill-fated world, not provided with leadership. This may be part of the reason Shiʿi discourse has been so powerful as a means of protest, but so at odds with the assumption of power.

[100] Compare this to Hujwīrī's argument that human saints were better than angels because the saints overcome human frailty in their spirituality whereas the angels do not have to transcend corporeal frailty: Renard, *God's Friends,* 266. This form of greatness-through-weakness is applicable to the imams who are subjected to severe ridicule and persecution yet ascend to even greater spiritual heights than the saints.

Perhaps the single most straightforward example of spiritual power compensating for physical limitations is the imams' ability to move their bodies to other locations on earth in a flash.[102] In many instances, the imams transport themselves from one city to another instantly or temporarily remove themselves from captivity in order to fulfill a task.[103] The author of *Dalāʾil,* for instance, records a fascinating story from Aḥmad al-Tabbān, who recalls being awakened by Imam al-Kāẓim and taken on a journey. The uniqueness of this trip is clarified from the start. Al-

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[101] See Sindawi, "The Role of Lions," especially 378-384. In one account, the lion from a curtain jumps out at the imam's command—explain (*Manāqib* IV: 323-324). In another instance, al-ʿAskarī was thrown to the wild animals to be eaten, but instead the lions joined the imam in prayer: *al-Irshād,* II: 334-335 (522). Shiʿi writers have often claimed that no wild beast would ever eat a descendent of the prophet Ibn ʿAbd al-Waḥḥāb records a lion bowing down to Imam ʿAlī (*ʿUyūn,* 25; cf. ibid, 73). This can be contrasted with famous Christian martyrs who, though sometimes saved, are often devoured by lions: reference. Further, the legendary *Abū Muslim Nāma* contains a physical battle between Abū Muslim and a tiger: Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs,* 129—a scene which I have not found replicated among the biographies of the imams. A shift in how lions figured in Christian hagiography was occurring around this same time, shifting from an animal to which martyrs were fed to an animal which aided the saint: Elliott, *Roads to Paradise,* 193-204.

[102] Examples of the imams transporting their bodies across great distances or through barriers include: *Ithbāt,* 196-197, 215-216; *Dalāʾil,* 133 (where Imam al-Ṣādiq sails with a companion out to a place where the

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prophet and previous imams live in tents); cf. *Dalāʾil*, 139-140. Lobenstein lists some examples of al-Ṣādiq's travels: "Miracles," 240. Amir-Moezzi cites examples in several sources for numerous imams: *Spirituality,* 204-208. The imams are also able to transport the bodies of other people (see example of Aḥmad al-Tabbān below) and other objects (al-Kāẓim, for example, twice caused a special book to return to him from another location: *Dalāʾil,* 169-170; *Manāqib,* IV: 328-329). For this theme in other types of hagiographies, see Renard, *Friends,* 115-116.

[103] In the latter case, the imam typically returns himself to the place of captivity once his task is finished. This is the case in the story of al-Kāẓim recorded by al-Ṭabrisī (*Iʿlām,* 306). In this account Abu al-Khālid al-Zabbālī recalls his distress when he saw that the Caliph al-Mahdī had Imam al-Kāẓim in his control and was transferring him to another location. But the imam told Abū al-Khālid to meet him at a specific place on a certain day. Abū al-Khālid faithfully went to the location specified by the imam and awaited his coming. The devoted follower was rewarded when, late in the day, the imam arrived on a mule. When the imam called to him, Abū al-Khālid exclaimed, "Here I am, oh son of the Prophet! Praise God that he saved you from their grip!" But the imam ironically responded, "Abū al-Khālid, I will return to them; I have not escaped [permanently] from them." Interestingly, this is one of the uncommon instances where al-Ṭabrisī adds material not found in al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād*. Within this narrative alone, it is unclear whether al-Kāẓim's movement was miraculous or under the caliph's permission. The same story is found in the *Ithbāt* (196-197), but in the *Ithbāt* the narrator claims God tricked the caliph into giving the imam permission to leave (*ṣarafa Allāh kaydahi ʿanhu*).

In either case, the nature of the story fits a general pattern of similar stories about the imams' temporary escapes which make the miraculous nature of the event more clear. This particular story is useful in pointing again to the devotional and didactic purposes of these stories. In this case, the imam's forced departure from the placed inhabited by Abū al-Khālid parallels the forced departure of the twelfth imam, al-Mahdī. In both cases, the followers are informed that the imam will return. And in the case of Abū al-Khālid, his obedience and patience, despite the late hour of the imam's return, was rewarded. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, the captivity which many of the imams endured during their lifetimes provides fertile ground for the cultivation of religious imagery which can meaningfully speak to a community awaiting the return of al-Mahdī. As the faithful await their imam, they can trust that the imams will protect them. Repeatedly we see that without trying to forcefully control the flow of history—a history that is destined to persecute, and eventually murder, them—the imams step outside that natural history to attend to the needs of those who love them.

Tabbān relates, "he [the imam] took me from my house, but the door was locked and I do not know how he got me out." After the imam seats Aḥmad on his camel behind him, the two journey together. When they stop, the imam prays, doing twenty-four prostrations, and then he asks Aḥmad if he knows where he is. He does not. The imam informs him that they have come to the grave of Imam al-Ḥusayn, and then they set out on another journey. At the next stop, the imam again prays twenty-four prostrations and informs Aḥmad of his whereabouts; this time they are at the Mosque of Kūfa, where Imam ʿAlī was killed.[104] Following the same pattern, they go on to visit the tomb of Abraham, the holy sites of Mecca, and Muḥammad's mosque and grave in Medina. After performing a few additional miracles for Aḥmad al-Tabbān,[105] their travels together culminate at the top of a great mountain range where Aḥmad admits to his exhaustion from the travels—the imam, notably, does not suffer from such physical exhaustion. Bringing the story full-circle, the imam offers to take the tired man back to his home so that he can go back to sleep.[106]

The framing of this story clarifies that the journeys between the far-off places occurred over the course of a single night.[107] The physical limitations encountered by the imam's body, such as locked doors or great distances, are overcome by him. Part of the proof of his imamate is this very ability to transcend natural corporeal confines, emphasizing voluntary nature of suffering/confinement and thus salvaging a sense of ideal masculinity. In this story and many others cited above, the purpose is to impart spiritual knowledge and perform important spiritual tasks. These were special events, not mundane daily activities of the imams. The author of *Dalāʾil* uses this event to assure the audience of the imam's identity and to display the leader's spiritual power over the material world.

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[104] The text here seems to indicate the importance of the Mosque of Kūfa having something to do with a bronze basin (*ṭast*) which is there, but I have yet to identify the significance of this reference.

[105] Here the imam displays his ability to control the movement of celestial bodies, particularly the sun.

[106] *Dalāʾil*, 170-171.

[107] Of course, this also creates a delightful ambiguity as to whether the whole event was just a dream. Nothing in the language suggests this to be the case, but the fact that the narrator was sleeping when the story started and sleeping when it ended certainly leaves open that possibility. Other stories of the

The biographers embrace a dichotomy, one in which the spirit has clear precedence over the body.[108] Within the worldview presented in the biographies, material power is ultimately subservient to non-material power. By effectively making the imams' immaterial spirits the locus of their power, the criterion of authority are also placed within the spiritual realm. This hierarchical vision of the cosmic order has further implications which will be explored in the next section. We see, however, that the true leaders of the spiritual world are the imams, and only those who follow them

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imams transporting themselves (with or without others) are less ambiguous, however, and were clearly understood to be real events. *Examples(look at Sajjad and Sadiq in Dala'il).*

[108] There are many additional ways in which this assumption comes through in the narratives. Consider, for instance, al-Ḥasan's speech and testament which he gives after he has coughed up his liver into a basin. He prefaces his speech with these words: *wa-qad suqītu al-samm wa-ramaytu bi-kabdī fī al-ṭast* (*al-Irshād,* II: 16-17 (Eng: 287-288)). Or in another cast, al-Ḥusayn is able to speak to people even after his head is severed from his body: *al-Irshād,* II: 117-118 (367). See also Sindawi, "The Sea," 471.

will be saved. Their spiritual authority is emphatically real and binding. Those who have their eyes opened will see the light of the imams.[109]

III.C. Gendered Ambiguity: Imam-like Daughters and the Infallible Fatima

Despite the unquestionable centrality of men in the biographies of the all-male imams, there is no shortage of important women in this literature. I have already noted the praise and honor repeatedly bestowed on the mothers of the imams. In a similar fashion, the daughters of the imams often play critical roles within the familial settings of this holy lineage. In fact, nearly every woman who receives positive attention within the biographies is either a mother or a daughter of one of the imams. Without question, the crowning example of the elevation of daughters is found in the unparalleled praise bestowed upon Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ.[110] But other daughters of imams figure prominently as well.

After Fāṭima, no woman stands out quite as powerfully in the literature as Zaynab (d. 62/682), the daughter of ʿAlī and Fāṭima.[111] And no moment of her life is remembered more than her role following the massacre at Karbalāʾ.[112] At ʿĀshūrā, the central tragedy of Shiʿism, Zaynab boldly shames the murderers of her brother. Al-Mufīd records that when the head of al-Ḥusayn was brought before the governor of Kūfa, ʿUbayd Allāh b. Ziyād (d. 67/686), Zaynab dramatically displays her resistance to the governor. In clear contrast to the wealthy and privileged surroundings of the governor's palace, Zaynab puts on "her dirtiest clothes," and when the governor calls on her, she refused to acknowledge him.[113] When she does engage Ibn Ziyād, she declares God's pending judgment on him, saying, "God will gather you and us together. You will plead your excuses to Him and we will be your adversaries before Him." In the days after Imam al-Ḥusayn's death, Zaynab carried the voice of resistance and became the spokesperson for the remnants of the holy family. Just moments following her altercation with Ibn Ziyād, the governor threatened to kill the new imam, ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sajjād. Zaynab quickly steps in to intercede on his behalf, declaring that they will have to kill her to get to him. In other words, she functions as the imam's protector.[114] Zaynab also performs the roles of spokesperson, intercessor, and protector when the family is taken before the Umayyad Caliph Yazīd in Damascus. Al-Mufīd conveys a powerful image when one of Yazīd's guards points to the younger daughter of al-Ḥusayn, Fāṭima, and demanded that she be given over to him for him to possess. The young girl clinged to the skirt of her aunt, Zaynab, who assures Fāṭima that this will not happen. She then lambasts the man for presuming to have comparable rank. Yazīd became enraged by Zaynab's confidence and declared that he is the only one who can decide on such matters. But Zaynab did not consent to his authority in any form and instead assumed the position of power, declaring herself to be "led by the religion of God." She rebuked the caliph for his treachery and oppression, and the caliph grudgingly backed down from the confrontation.[115]

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[109] For an interesting discussion of vision and conversion to Shi'ism in modern contexts, see Khalid Sindawi, "*Al-Mustabṣirūn,* 'Those Who Are Able to See the Light': Sunnī Conversion to Twelver Shīʿism in Modern Times," *Die Welt des Islams* 51, (2011), 210-234.

[110] Of course, Fāṭima is not a daughter of an imam, but the daughter of the Prophet. But the category of the imams overlaps with that of the Prophet to such a degree that the effect remains same. More on Fāṭima below.

[111] Among the biographies of the imams, *Ithbāt* and *Dalāʾil* have very little on Zaynab, but *al-Irshād* (especially II: 115-120, (Eng: 365-369)) has influential stories about Zaynab which are then found partially in *Iʿlām*, *Manāqib*, and subsequent biographies.

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[112] On Zaynab's legacy in relationship to Karbala, see Kamran Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala,* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 9, 118, 136-137; ibid (ed.), *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shiʿi Islam,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), especially those chapters by Ingvild Flaskerud, Faegheh Shirazi, Syed Akbar Hyder, and Lara Z. Deeb; Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shiʿi Lebanon,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 148ff.

[113] *Al-Irshād,* II: 115-116 (Eng: 365); *Iʿlām,* 257.

[114] *Al-Irshād*, II: 116-117 (Eng: 366); *Iʿlām,* 257. In another case, Zaynab tends to the ill imam: *al-Irshad,* II: 93 (Eng: 348).

Although Zaynab and Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ are the most famous of the daughters of the Infallibles, other daughters also appear as spokespersons for the family or defenders of the family's rights. For example, on numerous occasions the biographers place Ḥakīma, the daughter of Imam al-Jawād, in a prominent role. She lived through the imamates of the last four imams and acted as their messengers to the public and was involved in their education and protection.[116] Other daughters who play roles include Fāṭima bt. al-Ḥasan,[117] Fāṭima bt. al-Ḥusayn (the one whom Zaynab saved from

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[115] *Al-Irshād*, II: 121 (369); *Iᶜlām,* 258.

[116] *Dalāʾil,* 205, 264-265; *al-Iᶜlām,* 408; *Manāqib,* IV: 411, 426-427, 474; al-Irbilī, *Kashf,* III: 143, 237-238, 241, 274.

[117] Al-Khāqānī, *Ummuhāt,* 191. She is also the wife of Imam al-Sajjād and mother of Imam al-Bāqir, thus uniting the Ḥasanid and Ḥusaynid lines of the family.

Yazid's guards),[118] and Ḥakīma bt. Mūsá.[119] The legacies of the various daughters of the imams have endured in later centuries of Shiʿism and been the focus of different degrees of devotion.

One need only visit the city of Qom, in Iran, to experience the ongoing legacies of piety attached to some of these relatively lesser-known daughters of imams. There, the shrine to Fāṭima bint Mūsá (d. 201/816), the daughter of the seventh imam, is lavished with devotion by pilgrims and the local population alike. The position of daughters as children of the imams and their simultaneous exclusion from the imamate on account of their body illuminate a discussion of the gendered nature of the imamate itself. As Neal has argued, "the history of masculinity will be strong when it takes more account of women."[120] The daughters of the imams participate in many of the distinguishing characteristics of their fathers, but their differences signify a parallel but unequal purpose for their constructed legacies.

There can be no doubt that Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ is the most elevated personality among the daughters discussed in the biographies of the imams. The only woman to be counted among the Fourteen Infallibles, she is also presented with primordial origins which relate to the cosmology discussed in the previous chapter.[121] Fāṭima is tied to the divinely ordained lineage of male *awṣīyāʾ* in three distinct roles: as daughter of the

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[118] *Ithbāt,* 167.

[119] *Ithbāt,* 217-218; *Dalāʾil,* 197.

[120] Neal, *The Masculine Self,* 252.

[121] See discussion below.

Prophet, wife of Imam ʿAlī, and mother of Imams al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. But the role of daughter is arguably the most important of the three—as Ibn Shahrāshūb states, "Women's honor is through their fathers" (*sharaf al-nisāʾ bi-ābāʾihim*).[122] It is fitting, therefore, to grapple here with the significance of the feminine intrusion posed by the presence of Fāṭima—and to a lesser extent, other prominent daughters—among the otherwise-all-male club of imams/infallibles.

Among the striking aspects of Fāṭima's portrayal within this literature are the ways in which she functions like—or even stands in for—the imams at certain key moments. Fāṭima is clearly not like other women:[123] she is part of the pre-existent light (*nūr*) from which the other imams were formed;[124] she speaks from the womb;[125] she is infallible (*maʿṣūma*);[126] angels speak to her;[127] she possesses a divinely-revealed message

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[122] Ibn Shahrāshūb uses this statement in his case to demonstrate that Fāṭima is superior to Mary: *Manāqib,* 3:407. *Dalāʾil* records that "daughters of prophets do no menstruate" (cited by Soufi, "The Image," 169, and also in Kulaynī [get original]). It is, perhaps, the fact that her role as daughter comes first in her life, that it may be given the most weight. Her subsequent roles as wife and mother are, in some respects, derivative.

[123] Majlisī records in *Bihār al-anwār,* "Fāṭima is not like the women of the children of Ādam: she is not defective as they are defective" (quoted by Clohessy, *Fatima*, 67; he gives other references there as well). Her unique status is commented upon in many other ways as well. See, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 140-141; *Iʿlām,* 161-162. See also, Soufi, "The Image," 68.

[124] Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 135-136, 143-145; *Manāqib,* III: 372. See also the references in chapter two; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 70-78.

[125] *Dalāʾil,* 12; Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 139. See also Soufi, "The Image," 75; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 82-86.

[126] *Iʿlām,* 162-165; *Manāqib,* III: 380, passim. See also, Clohessy, 67-68.

[127] *Dalāʾil,* 56-57. See also, Soufi, "The Image," 77; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 98-99.

(usually referred to as her *muṣḥaf*);[128] she is made aware of future events;[129] she performs extreme displays of piety;[130] she partakes in the Prophet's inheritance;[131] she publicly confronts Abū Bakr and ᶜUmar over the claim to the caliphate;[132] and she dies a martyr's death at the hands of enemies of the Shiᶜa.[133] In every one of these extraordinary ways, Fāṭima is like the imams. She is even considered to have a role in the judgment of humanity at the end of the world.[134]

Nevertheless, despite the many ways in which Fāṭima is equated with the imams—functionally and as an object of devotion—she is never considered to be a full imam. In the face of all her many qualifications for the position, she is disqualified in one critical regard: her body. Fāṭima's anatomy is the definitive separation between her and the imams. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that an exceptionally large number of the narratives about Fāṭima focus on her body and her bodily performances. Her body is put on display in ideal ways that rival any of her fellow infallibles.

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[128] *Ithbāt,* 168-169; *al-Irshād,* II: 159, 186 (Eng: 395, 414); *Iᶜlām,* 287-288. See Sindawi, "'Fāṭima's Book': A Shiᶜite Qurʾan," *Rivista degli studi orientali* 78, no. 1 (2007): 57-70.

[129] For example, she knows of al-Ḥusayn's future painful martyrdom (Soufi, "The Image," 63-4). See also, Ibn ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb, *ᶜUyūn,* 144.

[130] She prays so much, for instance, that her feet swell (*Dalāʾil,* 56; Irbilī, *Kashf,* II: 181). See also, Soufi, "The Image," 74.

[131] See references in Soufi, "The Image," 100-106. This is typically understood to primarily refer to the piece of land called Faḍak, but, as Margoliouth has pointed out, the earliest sources are not always clear about the content of Fāṭima's inheritance and it occasionally overlaps with her protest over Abū Bakr's claim to the caliphate. She is, of course, denied this inheritance and is thus effectively subjected to betrayal by the Prophet's companions. For more on the betrayal suffered by each of the imams, see chapter four.

[132] See references in Soufi, "The Image," 109-110, 120.

[133] Soufi, "The Image," 119. For more on the topic of martyrdom of the imams, see chapter five.

[134] See Soufi, "The Image," 181-195.

The birth and death of Fāṭima provide obvious opportunities to encounter the body of Fāṭima within the text. Like the imams, Fāṭima is part of the primordial spermatic light substance—the *nūr muḥammadī*—which was either passed down through history via a pure race of *awṣīyā* or was directly given to her mother in some other manner. The narratives which detail the latter manner of conception tell a fascinating story set in Muḥammad's journey into the heavens (known as the *miʿrāj*).[135] In its most popular form, Muḥammad later explains to ʿĀʾisha what happened while in heaven, saying, "Gabriel brought me to the Ṭūbá tree and gave me an apple from it. I consumed it and sperm formed in my loins. When I came down to earth, I had intercourse with Khadīja and she became pregnant with Fāṭima."[136] The story clarifies the notion that Fāṭima's essence is heavenly and pure. Interestingly, this account is regularly framed by ʿĀʾisha's disconcerted (perhaps jealous)[137] reaction to seeing the Prophet put his tongue into Fāṭima's mouth. This motif has already been discussed in relation to the imams in the last chapter, but in the case of Fāṭima, the action is additionally clarified as a form of kissing. Muḥammad's account quoted above is a response to ʿĀʾisha's puzzlement: “I see you kissing Fāṭima’s mouth excessively and putting your tongue into her mouth.”[138] After describing the heavenly origin of Fāṭima, Muḥuammad goes on to add, “Whenever I long for heaven, I kiss her and put my tongue into her mouth; for through her I encounter the breeze of heaven and through her I encounter the scent of the Ṭūbá tree. For she is a heavenly human (*insīya samāwīya*).”[139]

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[135] This journey has typically been linked to the *isrāʾ*: Sūrat al-Isrāʾ (17): 1. For an overview of topic , see B. Schrieke [J. Horovitz], "Miʿrā̲d̲j̲: In Islamic Exegesis," EI^2; J.E. Bencheikh, "Miʿrā̲d̲j̲: In Arabic Literature," EI^2. For the problems that this creates for dating the birth of Fāṭima, see Clohessy, *Fatima,* 16-20.

[136] *Iʿlām,* 164. Cf. See also Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 137-139; *Manāqib,* III: 383.

[137] On the motif of wifely jealousy, see chapter four.

There are numerous other accounts which relate the Prophet’s physical affection for Fāṭima. Imam al-Ṣādiq is recorded saying, “[the Prophet] would not go to sleep until he kissed the side of Fāṭima’s face and put his face between Fāṭima’s breasts (*bayn thadīyay Fāṭima*) and prayed for her.”[140] Through these stories, the hearer not only perceives the heavenly nature of Fāṭima but also the profound connection between Fāṭima and the Prophet. In other narratives, this connection is made more explicit, such as when the Prophet says that Fāṭima is a part of him,[141] or when Fāṭima is called “mother of her father” (*umm abīhā*).[142]

As mentioned, Fāṭima’s death is another critical moment of reflection on the body. Her unique status raised questions about who would be worthy to wash Fāṭima’s corpse, and some early sources suggest Fāṭima actually performed her own ritual washings before her death and thus did not need anyone else to wash her dead body.[143] The opinion that came to dominate in Shiʿi narratives, however, was that ʿAlī washed Fāṭima's body after her death and—in accordance with her wishes—buried her secretly at night in an undisclosed location.[144]

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[138] *Iʿlām,* 164. See also Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 137-139; *Manāqib,* III: 383.

[139] *Iʿlām,* 164. See also Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 137-139; *Manāqib,* III: 383; Soufi, “The Image,” 163-165; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 68-69, 78-84.

[140] *Manāqib,* III: 382. See also Irbilī, *Kashf,* II: 179.

[141] Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 140; *Iʿlām,* 162; *Manāqib,* III: 391; References in Soufi, “The Image,” 74.

[142] *Manāqib,* III: 406. See also: Soufi, “The Image,” 69; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 65.

Another way in which the body of Fāṭima is portrayed in the texts is through the accounts of her appearance. Inevitably, Fāṭima is remembered as beautiful and radiant. She is likened to "the full moon or the sun hidden by the clouds."[145] Ibn Shahrāshūb goes on to describe her as being "fair and tender-skinned"[146]—a description, as Soufi notes, that matches that of the virgin maidens of paradise (*ḥūrīya*).[147] In some cases, Fāṭima is explicitly associated with the *ḥūrīya.*[148] This beauty is connected to her heavenly origins as described above as well the pervasive light imagery used to describe her. Her most common honorific, al-Zahrāʾ, is usually understood to be a reference to her radiance.[149] So magnificent was the light which appeared at her birth that the angels had never seen anything like it.[150]

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[143] Irbilī, *Kashf,* II: 250-260. Interestingly, this tradition is mostly found among Sunni sources. See Soufi, "The Image," 121-122, n. 168.

[144] Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 145-146; *Iʿlām,* 165. Al-Ṭabrisī also discusses here the problem that this controversy causes for how to perform *ziyāra* to her grave. He lists several possible sites and recommends visiting each of them. On the legal and cultural debates over the merits of a husband washing the body of his deceased wife, see Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave,* 43-83, especially 59-62 where the example of ʿAlī washing the body of Fāṭima plays a role in how Shiʿi scholars articulated their position on this topic. See also Soufi, "The Image," 121-124.

[145] *Manāqib,* III: 405. Cf. *Dalāʾil,* 55-56; Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 145-146. See also Soufi, "The Image," 162.

[146] *Manāqib,* III: 405.

[147] Soufi, "The Image," 163. On the *ḥūrīya,* see A.J. Wensinck [Ch. Pellat], "Ḥūr," EI^2.

[148] *Dalāʾil,* 54-55; Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 140; Soufi, "The Image," 162-164; Karen Ruffle, "May Fatimah Gather Our Tears: The Mystical and Intercessory Powers of Fatimah al-Zahra in Indo-Persian, Shiʿi Devotional Literature and Performance," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010), 397.

Once again, these characteristics primarily highlight the similarities between Fāṭima and the male imams. The difference, however, rests upon gender. Fāṭima's genitalia—not solely the absence of a penis—is the definitive quality which categorically dispossess Fāṭima of the imamate. It should be no surprise, therefore, that the biographers often direct their attention to this part of Fāṭima's body, perhaps more so than any other.[151] The most well-known and regularly remarked-upon aspect of

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[149] See the sources listed in Soufi, "The Image," 158-166; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 94-99; Ruffle, "May Fatimah Gather," 386-389.

[150] *Dalāʾil,* 13. See also: Soufi, "The Image," 159.

[151] This seems to be a common feature of much of the literature from this period which does talk about women. The vagina, projected as the most uniquely feminine part of the body, comes to implicitly define women—or at least it certainly represents them. Women are regularly categorized by what goes into their vagina (in regards to sexual activity—and we can note here the tendency to understand sexual activity solely in terms of vaginal penetration [many sources could be cited for this]) as well as what comes out of their vagina (be it offspring at childbirth or blood at menstruation). In this way, the vagina is both a source of condemnation as well as the locus of redemption. Even the light attributed to Fāṭima is sometimes associated with her vagina. Consider Majlisī's interpretation of the description of her being like a "sun hidden by the clouds" as being a reference to her chastity and veiling (noted in Soufi, "The Image," 162). In this way, covering and protection of her sexual organs is analogous to the clouds covering Fāṭima's light. Another example of a woman's vagina being associated with her radiant light—in this case from a different body of literature—is found in the *Abū Muslim Nāmā* where Abū Muslim's mother is described as having a light shining from underneath her skirt (quoted in Babayan, 128). Kathryn Babayan rightfully reflects on this passage, wondering why it is women continually have to be defended as being sexually chaste and pure (134). I would add to her discussion that the observation further points to the idea that women are regularly reduced to their genitals in the literature of this period. Praising a woman, in such a framework, would necessitate a discussion of her sexual purity.

Fāṭima's body is that she did not menstruate.[152] That "affliction" which plagues women did not afflict Fāṭima. Her vagina was completely untainted by the impurity of blood. Even at childbirth, she expelled no blood.[153] The often confusing description of Fāṭima as "the virgin" (*al-batūl*) is, at least in part, understood on account of the fact that she did not menstruate. In one account, the Prophet is asked how it is that Fāṭima is a *batūl,* and the Prophet responds, "*al-Batūl* is someone who never sees red [blood], that is, she does not menstruate. For menstruation is unsuitable (*makrūh*) for the daughters of the prophets."[154] This aspect of Fāṭima is seen to have a purifying effect on all of her progeny and—by extension—their followers. With this in mind (rarely missing an opportunity to deride their adversaries), Shiʿi sources sometimes refer to Sunnis as such things as "the defective cursed children of menstruation" (*banī al-ṭamth al-malāʿīn al-ʿayb*).[155]

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[152] *Ithbāt,* 163-164; Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 140; *Iʿlām,* 161-162. Cf. Clohessy, *Fatima,* 111-115.

[153] *Ithbāt,* 163-164. In some cases, the she is said to have given birth through her thigh: Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 61-62); Soufi, "The Image," 173ff; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 111-115. Similar claims were made about Mary by some Christian sources: Jennifer Glancy, *Corporeal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 81-136.

[154] *Dalāʾil,* 55. Cf. Irbilī, *Kashf,* II: 173. On her virginity, see Soufi, "The Image," 167-180; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 103-133. Of course, this clearly relates to the theoretical rivalry between the Virgin Mary and Fāṭima. This will be discussed more below. But we also see here the way in which the category of daughters is regarded with great esteem (albeit derivative from their fathers).

[155] *Manāqib,* III: 407. Within this accusation is another example of the thorough dehumanization of non-Shiʿa (see above portions in this chapter). It is not a coincidence that the slander is used here in reference to the abuse received by the very woman who never menstruated. See also, Kohlberg, "The Position of the 'walad zinā," 239; Soufi, "The Image," 113-114.

The significance of Fāṭima's body is made most explicit, however, in an oft-repeated phrase in the biographies: "Fāṭima kept her vagina chaste, so God has protected her progeny from the fire" (*inna Fāṭima aḥṣanat farjahā fa-ḥarrama Allāh dhurīyatahā ʿalá al-nār*).[156] Fāṭima exerts control and protection over her children through her privates; i.e., through the safeguarding of her genitals and protecting them from any illicit activity. By this uniquely feminine accomplishment, Fāṭima has secured the sanctification of herself, her children, and (implicitly) all of the Shiʿa. Her power resides in her body.

What becomes clear is that Fāṭima represents an entirely distinct ontological category, separate from woman, man, or imam. She embodies a feminine ideal completely unattainable by real women who are not part of the *nūr muḥammadī*—women who menstruate, who bleed at childbirth, and to whom angels do not speak. Fāṭima stands above the normal woman, but she is not entirely alone in this position. Other daughters of the imams are given similar descriptions, as are such women as Khadīja and Mary. These super-women, among whom Fāṭima is regularly affirmed to be the best,[157] stand in a category of their own. They are not grouped with the prophets or imams on account of their gender, nor are they (normal) women. This conceptual category of the feminine ideal has been noted by other scholars and is found in other (Sunni and Shiʿi) literatures.[158] The undergirding categorical logic which supports this distinction—and which is a defining feature of these biographies in general—is nicely summarized by Denise Soufi: "how could a woman who was not of extraordinary caliber be born of the Prophet, be married to the venerated hero ʿAlī, and be the mother of Ḥasan and the martyred Ḥusayn, the Prophet's beloved grandchildren?"[159] Within the logic which pervades these biographies, it is inconceivable that any normal woman could hold these honors. The uniquely ideal masculinity of the men in her life necessitated that she lived to a higher standard than other women. Fāṭima's canonical inclusion among the Fourteen Infallibles solidifies the distinctiveness of the "feminine ideal" category within mainstream Shiʿi literature.

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[156] *Manāqib,* III: 383, 409; Irbilī, II: 180. Here again, Fāṭima is being put into implicit comparison with Mary who is described in the Qur'an as having "kept her vagina chaste" (Sūrat al-Taḥrīm (66): 12).

[157] Within the broader Islamic tradition, medieval Muslim scholars have sometimes compared the merits of women such as Āsīya, Mary, Khadīja, Fāṭima, and ʿĀʾisha (see Spellberg, *Politics,* especially 151-190). For most Shiʿa, ʿĀʾisha does not belong in this discussion and is often derided explicitly (see chapter four). The biographies used in this study are most commonly interested in the comparisons between Mary and Fāṭima. Ibn Shahrāshūb has an extensive comparison of the two (III: 407-410). But the other biographers of Fāṭima tend to draw comparisons as well (see *Dalāʾil,* 54-57; Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *ʿUyūn,* 141-143; *Iʿlām,* 163). Some of the names and qualities of Fāṭima appear to be in direct relationship to Mary, perhaps as an

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attempt to make sure Fāṭima measures well in the comparison. The attribution of "the virgin" (*al-batūl*) is particularly pertinent in this regard and the title of "the greater Mary" (*Marīyam al-kubrá*) is even more telling. In all cases, Fāṭima is considered by the Shiʿi biographers to be the greatest of these women, crowning her with the title "queen of women" (*sayyidat al-nisaʾ*). See also, Soufi, "The Image," 167-198; Verena Klemm, "Image Formation of an Islamic Legen: Fāṭima, the Daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad," in Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal, edited by S. Günther, 181-208 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 193-195; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 53-66, 193-223.

[158] This has been particularly well explained by Jamal Elias in "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism," *Muslim World* 77, nos. 3-4 (1988), 209-224. On this observation in relationship to Fāṭima, see Soufi, "The Image," 166-167, 196-197; Ruffle, "May Fatimah," especially 396-397. An even more spiritualized version of the feminine ideal—which is mostly foreign to the biographies used in this study, but interesting for comparative purposes—is described by Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, especially 51-73. Barbara Stowasser has described how the wives of the Prophet form a type of feminine ideal in many Sunni literatures: "The Mothers of the Believers in the Ḥadīth," *The Muslim World* 82, no. 1-2 (1992), 33-35.

[159] Soufi, "The Image," 207.

But what does this alternative category of "feminine ideal" mean in regards to the devotional perspectives of the biographies of the imams? What purpose does it serve? There is a tendency to assume that these (primarily male) reflections on the feminine ideal are directed toward women and offered as a model for women to emulate. And this objective may be present. Fāṭima, Zaynab, and other daughters of the imams are presented as an ideal feminine form toward which women might strive. In later centuries, there has been even more capitalization upon the legacy of Fāṭima and Zaynab for the elaboration of proper women's behavior.[160]

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the memory of Fāṭima, for instance, was only constructed for the devotional needs of women. In fact, it appears to me that devotional relevance for women is a secondary concern in the literature at hand. Fāṭima—and the other daughters, though to a lesser extent—are critically important and powerful symbols that give cues as to how male Shiʿi devotion toward the imams should be oriented. Several aspects of Fāṭima's image in the biographies stand out in this regard. First of all, Fāṭima is in a position to express uniquely intimate emotions of love with the original holy family. Her love and devotion for her father, her husband, and her children are models for all the Shiᶜa as they seek to cultivate their love for the Prophet and imams.[161] Her devotion motivates her to speak out against those who usurp her family's rights.[162] And her unyielding position is so firm that the biographers often her depicted as the one who will judge her family's oppressors on the Day of Reckoning.[163] Fāṭima's exemplary qualities manifest themselves in and through her devotion to her perfect male counterparts. This way of positioning ideal women can be seen in other literatures of the period as well. ᶜĀisha of Merve, for example, was an exemplary figure in early Sufism. Sulamī quoted her as describing her own spiritual light as being derived from her male counterparts.[164] Similarly, Fāṭima's light—although more ontologically complex—derived through her relationship with men.

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[160] See Ruffle, "May Fatimah;" Klemm, "Image Formation." For examples of how the legacies of Fāṭima and Zaynab have recently been used to justify women's participation in public affairs, see Lara Deeb, "From Mourning to Activism: Sayyedeh Zaynab, Lebanese Shiʿi Women, and the Transformation of Ashura," in *Women of Karbala,* edited by K. Aghaie (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 241-266; Lara Deeb, "Doing Good, Like Sayyida Zaynab': Labanese Shiʿi Women's Participation in the Public Sphere," in *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Muslim Majority Societies*, edited by Armando Salvatore and Mark LeVine (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 85-107; Matthew Pierce, "Remembering Fāṭima: New Means of Legitimizing Female Authority in Contemporary Shīʿī Discourse," in *Women, Leadership, and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority*, edited by Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach, 345-362 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

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[161] Consider, for instance, the verse that Ibn Shahrāshūb includes which is attributed to Fāṭima:

> There remains only one measure [of barley]:
> My hand bled despite my arm.
>
> And I have not veil [to wear] on my head
> Except a cloak whose fabric is worn out.
>
> By God, my sons are starving!
> O lord, don't leave them wretched!
>
> Their father is committed to good
> With stout arms and strong hands.

In this verse, Fāṭima faces great difficulties, but she endures them in a model fashion and praises her husband in conclusion (this translation is taken from Soufi, "The Image," 62-63).

[162] Soufi, "The Image," 70-71.

[163] Irbilī, *Kashf,* II: 267. See further references in Soufi, "The Image," 180-195. See also Mufid, *Amaali,* 133 (get Arabic original). In a powerful narrative, Imam ᶜAlī prays over Muḥammad's grave, saying, "Your daughter will inform you of your community's collaboration in oppressing her, so ask her about what happened!" (Soufi, "The Image," 124—she has the references from Ibn Abī Ḥadīd, Kulaynī, and al-Mufīd). See also, Clohessy, *Fatima,* 163-192.

A second essential way Fāṭima serves as an example to all Shiᶜa is through her role as mourner for the tragedies which befall the family. Frequently Fāṭima is presented as a eulogizer for her family. Ibn Shahrāshūb records these poetic verses from Fāṭima after her father's death:

> We have suffered from the loss of he who was of sincere disposition
> And of pure character, origin, and lineage.
>
> You were a full moon and a light which brought enlightenment.
> Books from the Powerful One used to descend upon you.
>
> And Jibrīl, the holy spirit, was our visitor.
> Then he disappeared and [now] all good is hidden.
>
> If only death had found us before you
> When you departed and veils obstructed you!
>
> We suffered from a loss which was not suffered
> By those who grieve, both Arab and non-Arab.
>
> The countries have become narrow for me after they had [once] been spacious.
> Your two cubs have been disgraced along with me.
>
> By God, you are the best of all creation
> And the most honest person with regard to truth and falsehood.
>
> So we will cry for you for as long as we live and as long as our eyes

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[164] "Whenever one of the fatiyān from anywhere seeks me out, I sense the light of his intention in my inner soul until he arrives. If I am successful in serving him and fulfilling his needs, that light becomes fully mine, but if I cut short my service to him the light goes out": Abū ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr an-niswa al-muta ᶜabbidāt aṣ-ṣūfiyyāt,* translated by Rkia E. Cornell (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999), 196-197.

> Remain bathed in tears which pour forth.[165]

The significance of eulogies such as this can hardly be overstated. They are the driving emotional force of the biographies and are explored further in the next chapter.[166] In the piece quoted above, Fāṭima models the appropriate response to the tragedy which befell the holy family. She praises the Prophet, indicts those who betrayed him, experiences immense grief over the affair, and vows to never cease to remember and mourn. Her example beckons those who hear her to join her in her mourning and to similarly vow never to cease.[167]

The complex devotional paradigm found in these biographies, which plays out according to the specific ontological categories in place, can be mapped in this way:[168]

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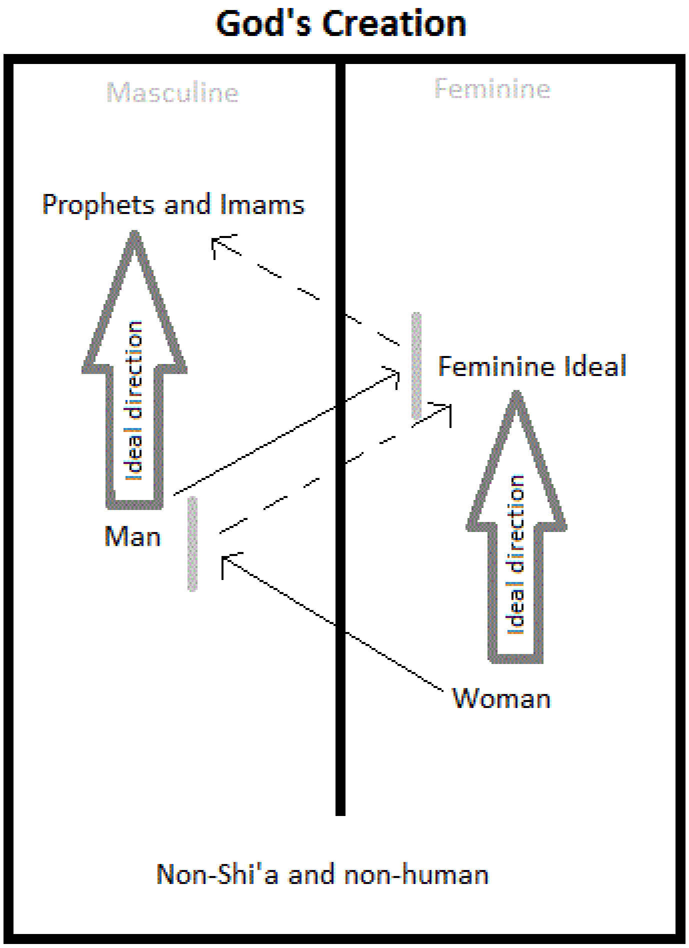
[165] *Manāqib,* III: 410. I have here borrowed Soufi's translation (117-118).

[166] See chapter five for a more full discussion of how the eulogies function as the modeled manner of coping with the betrayal (see chapter five) of the imams. Mourning poetry (*rithāʾ*) was often composed by women in the pre-Islamic Arabic and continued to feminine connotations into the medieval period.

[167] See Soufi, "The Image," 119; Klemm, "Image Formation," 204; Clohessy, *Fatima,* 48-66, 135-162; Ruffle, "May Fatimah," 386.

[168] This chart can be compared to that of J. Elias ("Female and Feminine," 220). Elias's chart provided some of the inspiration for the present one I have here, particularly in his attempt to make clear how it is that the feminine "exists above the male and below the male; however, she is never equal to him" (224). The present diagram is specifically intended to illuminate the gaze of devotion as it is found in the collective biographies of the imams. And I believe it provides a more complete visual explanation for this gendered vision of piety.


God's Creation
Masculine
Feminine
Prophets and Imams
Ideal direction
Feminine Ideal
Man
Ideal direction
Woman
Non-Shi'a and non-human

This chart helps illustrate the coherent symmetry and parallelism that is overlaid onto the hierarchical, dual-gendered ontology undergirding the literature. As men look to the prophets/imams as ideal models of manhood, they also direct their gaze of devotion toward the feminine ideal. For men, however, the feminine ideal is a model for devotion to the imams. In this way, the feminine becomes another means of approaching the imams and effectively feminizes the nature of their devotion. Men adopt a feminine position in their devotion vis-à-vis the imams. In parallel fashion, women are assumed to rightfully look to the feminine ideal as their model of femininity. But a key way that feminine ideal is approached remains going through the man and adopting a masculine position in their devotion.

For the Shiᶜa, Fāṭima is a uniquely suitable representative of the feminine ideal. Her physical and emotional connections to the Prophet and the imams are utilized by the biographers to praise and mourn the imams. By removing any faults or defects from the character and body of Fāṭima, a useful legacy is constructed toward which men can gaze. Most of the miracles attributed to Fāṭima perform this very function: removing bodily defects. Fāṭima is primarily a passive receptor of her miracles—spiritual origins, lack of menstruation, marriage being appointed in heaven,[169] bloodless/painless childbirth, etc. In each case, Fāṭima's miracles relate to her body and her lack of deficiency, but she does not transcend her body entirely. Her power is in her perfect body, not beyond it. She does not, for instance, have the kind of miracles described earlier in this chapter in relation to the imams.[170] Her miracles functionally separate her from the category of "woman," making her more useable for men (and simultaneously unattainable for women).[171] But at the same time, her difference from the imams is centered on her body.

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[169] On this, see *Dalāʾil,* 15-18; Ibn ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb, *ᶜUyūn,* 136; *Iᶜlām,* 164-165; *Manāqib,* III: 393-405; Irbilī, *Kashf,* *; Soufi, "The Image," 38-50; Sindawi, "Legends Concerning the Wedding of Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ as Reflected in Early Shīᶜite Literature," *Orientalia Suecana* 56, (2007): 181-191.

[170] Amir-Moezzi has noted that the earliest Shiᶜi sources do not typically list miracles for Fāṭima at all: "Knowledge," 203, n. 31.

[171] In some ways, the very act of conquering bodily deficiencies makes Fāṭima more relevant to men as well. The imams, of course, have completely perfect bodies but also have the power to completely transcend their confines and limitations.. Normal men, however, are less perfect manifestations of

This brings the discussion back to the precedence of the spirit over the body throughout this literature. The miracles of the imams demonstrate that the locus of the imams' powers is spiritual. Despite having perfect male bodies, their bodies are unfulfilled in this world. Fāṭima, in contrast, roots the feminine ideal in the female body.[172] Her fulfillment of her perfect body is a source of praise and inspiration for the Shiᶜa—for men and women, though in different ways. We can say, therefore, that the body (particularly the female body) is not seen as inherently evil or bad, though it may be dangerous. The body has the potential to be fruitfully put to use. Although the texts do not necessarily present a strict mind/body dualism, something found in numerous religious contexts of the ancient near east, there remains a gendered hierarchy. And that hierarchy prioritizes the spiritual over the physical and more closely aligns the spiritual with the male (via the imams) and the physical with the female.[173]

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humanity and thus the process of emulating the imams includes attempting to overcome their own individual bodily shortcomings (even if they are not inherent to their masculinity). Fāṭima's overcoming of her bodily deficiencies ironically becomes a more achievable goal for men.

[172] A. Schimmel has noted the tendency to associate the feminine with the material world and the masculine with the spiritual world in much of the contemporaneous Sufi literature: "'I Take Off the Dress,'" 268-283.

[173] In this regard, I find Athalya Brenner's critique of Danial Boyarin and Howard Eilberg-Schwartz to be a helpful one ("Mat[t]er, Dichotomy: Some Images of Female and Male Bodies in the Hebrew Bible," in *Begin with the Body,* eds. J Bekkenkamp and M. De Haardt, 201-214 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998). Brenner argues that while the Hebrew Bible may not have as severe of a mind/body dualism would develop in the Christian tradition, the mere fact that gender is both binary and hierarchical inevitably leads to a type of body/non-body dualism as well. Similarly, though many Islamicate literatures avoid a full denial of the body (as might be readily found in many early Christian literatures, for instance), corporeal functions are not imbued with the same level of religious significance as the non-corporeal.

This gendered hierarchy (related to the spirit and body) is mitigated, however, by the projection of a feminized form of masculine devotion to the imams (where the physical deficiency of normal men is made evident), and a masculinized form of the feminine ideal (where the idealized women is made such through a removal of her body's feminine imperfections). Through the biographies of the imams, the binary categories of man and woman are cast in ways that alter the meaning of both in relationship to the trauma and anxieties of a religious community determined to resist social pressures to forget their past. It is against the backdrop of the betrayal of the imams that the nature and significance of their bodies achieve tragic heights. The next chapter is devoted to understanding those betrayals.

III.D. Summary of Observations

I began this chapter by drawing attention to the obvious: biographies of the imams tell stories about male bodies. The biographies provide accounts of the lives of men who lived in real, corporeal confines with specific qualities. By considering the ways the imams' bodies are represented in the biographies, a few critical features of this literature emerge. First, attention to the representations of the imams' bodies and their bodily performances helps us see the extent to which the authors frame the stories around ideals that are important to them and the community, not solely on what historically happened. Though not exclusive of one another, there is a difference between these two points of emphasis that affects the type of stories remembered here.

This approach to the narratives leads to a second observation: the unique desires of the authors and the community which remembers these accounts become manifest through the presentations of the imams' lives. The ideal physical bodies of the imams, for example, are capable of outperforming any competitor. In turn, their bodies represent some of the authors' own physical desires for a masculine fulfillment even as the imams are portrayed in ways that go beyond the physical reality in which they (and the community) reside. Thus, these narratives not only serve as examples of the contested nature of ideal masculinity within specific historical contexts, the ideals embodied by the imams also point to the authors' hopes for an ideal order, ideal community, and ideal leadership.

These observations are tied to a final note. The imams function simultaneously as role models for behavior and as unattainable, utopian imaginations of the human form. By presenting an unachievable ideal, the authors retain both the practical concerns of the community for exemplary ways of conducting oneself while also instilling inspiration to cope with the personal and communal constraints one faces, be it through the hope of intervention by an imam or the confidence in an eventual rectification of injustices. Idealized women within this literature, particularly Fāṭima, ironically reinforce the masculinized construction of the ideal human form by functioning like an imam but remaining outside of that category. Yet, at the same time, the women function as a unique shaming mechanism with which authors critique certain men and helps provide space for an idealized spirituality that transcends the confines of one's biological constitution, sexual and otherwise.

Caroline Bynum concluded her article, "Why All the Fuss about the Body?" by stating that she is not alone in noticing "the complex link between body, death, and the past."[174] That link is evident here as well. By focusing on the bodies of the imams, we see more clearly how important it is to the authors that the imams not only fulfill their physical potential but overcome the obstacles laid before them. The limitations placed on the imams, therefore, are critical and necessary to the narrative structure of the genre and the central ideas therein. Those limitations are most evident in the betrayals (leading to the deaths) endured by the imams, a topic to which we now turn.

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[174] Bynum, "Why all the Fuss," 33.

Chapter Four: Betrayal

“They summoned us so that they might support us
and then they became hostile to us and killed us.”
–Imam al-Ḥusayn[1]

“Every day is ʿĀshūrāʾ; every land is Karbalāʾ”
-Imam al-Ṣādiq[2]

In the previous two chapters I highlighted facets of the biographies which have received little scholarly attention. In this chapter, however, I focus on a well-known aspect of the imams’ lives: their suffering. I look at the theme from several angles, emphasizing the subject of betrayal throughout. Deferring this topic to near the close of my dissertation is in keeping with the pattern set by the biographers themselves, who tend to place the betrayal and suffering of the imams near the end of their accounts. Indeed, the narrative arc of the accounts builds toward a climax of suffering, with readers reminded along the way that a grim fate is in store for the imam in question. Foreshadowings often take the form of stories of important figures receiving miraculous knowledge of that fate in advance. Such stories not only provide the audience with a sense of what is to come; they also add weight to the imam’s suffering by depicting the grief of significant characters who predeceased the imam in question and thus cannot be present in the stories that recount the actual betrayal and death.

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[1] *Irshād,* II: 110-111 (Eng: 362).

[2] *kull yawm ʿāshūrāʾ, kull ʿarḍ karbalāʾ* . The origins of this famous saying are unclear but Yitzak Nakash has some references: “An Attempt to Trace the Origin of the Rituals of ʿĀshūrāʾ,” *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series 33, issue 2 (1993): 164-165, n. 10.

This is particularly the case with the Prophet, as we find many instances in which he is made aware of the fate of ʿAlī, al-Ḥusayn, and other imams.

The most infamous of the accounts of betrayal is undoubtedly the massacre of al-Ḥusayn and his family at Karbalāʾ. In many ways the retelling of this event has rightly been seen as capturing the essence of Shiʿi social memory.[3] But I would also like to draw attention to the betrayals of the other infallibles. The betrayal of the prophet, for example, functions within this literature as an original betrayal, a type of "fall" of the Muslim community. Betrayals solidify a pattern of treachery in this genre, in which biographers and their audience operate under the assumption that each imam will be denied his natural and divinely-appointed rights. I will address the importance of that pattern using the example of Imam al-Riḍá.

Betrayals also serve as teaching moments within the literature. They provide a frame for the community, indicating those who are outside the picture and warning those who are inside to remain faithful. In this chapter's exploration of al-Ṣādiq's story, it is the *ghulāt* (the exaggerators) who emerge as outsiders, and the Shiʿi pretenders to the imamate who are being warned. Finally, as is the case with other aspects of this genre, the betrayal narratives contain gendered literary motifs and enshrine specific cultural assumptions related to sex, family, and kinship. This final point is particularly evident in the ascribed roles of the imams' wives, which I explore through the example of al-Ḥasan's story.

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[3] The way in which Hamid Dabashi filters most of his discussions of Shiʿism through the "Karbala Complex" is both indicative of this tendency: see *Shi'ism,* especially 73-100.

The authors of the biographies deal with betrayal in various ways. The death of al-Ḥusayn is the focal point of explicit discussions of perfidy, but the reality of the imams' betrayal is felt at every turn, whether expressed overtly (as in the following accounts) or merely implied. The fact that the imams are dispossessed of their rightful authority and persecuted at the hands of their enemies is the foundation of the meta-narrative that weaves the individual biographies together into a memorable and meaningful story. Furthermore, accounts of treachery are the places where the borders of the community are most clearly delineated. Narratives of the imams' sufferings solidify otherwise porous and unstable boundaries of religious identification. Certain assumptions regarding historical continuity undergird this process. We have seen the presumption in the biographies that the teachings of the imams are in consonance with each other. Now, in a similar manner, we find that the imams' betrayers are assumed to have ontological commonalities.

The biographies of the imams, from the 10th to 12th centuries, reveal an evolving sense of how the failure of the imams to acquire leadership over the greater Muslim community fits into salvation history. The affliction of the infallibles and the denial of their rights occupy a central place in the constitutive narrative that makes Shiʿism intelligible. Using narratives of suffering to build religious meaning is not unique to

Shiᶜism; it is arguably one of the most universal aspects of human religiosity.[4] The Shiᶜi biographies, then, provide an excellent window into this phenomenon and how and why it contributes to the transformation of memory.

IV.A. Betrayal on Stage: the Murder of al-Ḥusayn at Karbalāʾ

The martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn and his companions on the plains of Karbalāʾ in 61/680 is the center of gravity for Shiᶜi religious emotion.[5] Kamran Aghaie has called the battle at Karbalāʾ, "the most important symbolic event for Shi'ites, after the death of the Prophet,"[6] and Nakash argues that it has a "central role in shaping Shi'i identity and communal sense."[7] Most general studies of Shiᶜism devote substantial—if not the majority of—attention to this event and the rituals that commemorate it.[8]

The Shiᶜi biographers of the imams are cognizant of the symbolic significance of al-Ḥusayn's death. In some cases, the biographers go so far as to link the events at

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[4] For examples in other religious traditions, see Elizabeth Castelli, *Martydom and Memory;* Carlin A. Barton, "Savage Miracles: The Redemption of Lost Honor in Roman Society and the Sacrament of the Gladiator and the Martyr," *Representations* 45, (Winter, 1994): 41-71; Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self:*; Nouri Gana, *Signifying Loss: Toward a Poetics of Narrative Mourning,* (Lewisburg, UK: Bucknell University Press, 2011).

[5] I speak to the emotional aspect of the biographies in the next chapter.

[6] Kamran Aghaie, "The Origins of the Sunnite-Shi'ite Divide and the Emergence of the Taᶜziyeh Tradition," TDR 49, no. 4 (2005), 43.

[7] Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace the Origin," 161.

[8] Fred Donner has recently described the battle as Shiᶜism's "defining event": *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 190. More detailed examples of this can be found in the works of D. Pinault, H. Halm, M. Ayoub, and H. Dabashi.

Karbalāʾ to the eternal fate of each believer. Ibn Shahrāshūb, for example, records Imam al-Riḍá saying, “he for whom ʿĀshūrāʾ is his disaster, his sadness, and his tears, God will make the Day of Resurrection his joy, his happiness, his delight in heaven.”[9] The salvific significance of al-Ḥusayn’s fate has been compared to Christian ideas of atonement and redemption,[10] but such comparisons obscure the memory of al-Ḥusayn more than they reveal it. There is no sense, at least not in the literature under consideration in this study, that al-Ḥusayn’s death has any salvific power by itself. Instead, the biographers seem to operate under two key assumptions. First, they assume that a person’s feelings toward this event are a reliable indicator of whether or not that person truly loves the Prophet and his family.[11] Thus ʿĀshūrāʾ operates as a litmus test of the heart. The second assumption is that the person who loves the Prophet’s family will receive the favor of the Prophet and the other infallibles, who will intercede on his or her behalf come judgment day.[12] Al-Ṭabrisī, in his section on al-Ḥusayn, relates the following saying by the Prophet: “al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn are my sons. Whoever loves them, loves me. And whoever loves me loves God. And whoever loves God will be taken to heaven. Whoever hates them, hates me. Whoever hates me, hates God. Whoever hates God will be put into the fire on his face."[13]

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[9] *Manāqib* IV: 94. Cf. *al-Irshād,* II: 124-125 (Eng: 371-372); *Manāqib* IV: 91-95, 138-139. Discussions of this can be found in Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering,* 120-139.

[10] Henri Corbin, “De la philosophie prophétique en Islam Shîʾite,” *Eranos Jahrbuch* 31, (1962), 49-116, especially 101-105; Khalid Sindawi, “Jesus and Ḥusayn,” 50-65. Ayoub, however, also notes that the imams might be collectively compared to Christ—a suggestion which has yet to receive sufficient consideration: *Redemptive Suffering,* 216-217.

[11] For example, see *Manāqib* IV: 91-92.

[12] See *al-Irshād,* II: 131 (376-377); *Iʿlām,* 227; *Manāqib* IV: 67.

Although the massacre at Karbalāʾ was used by many Shiʿa as a powerful symbol of injustice from an early date,[14] it was some time before the collective biographies began to incorporate extensive reflection on the event. The *Ithbāt al-waṣīya* devotes little more attention to al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom than it does to that of any of the other imams. Similarly, the *Dalāʾil al-imāma* includes only brief narratives to the affair.[15] Of the five biographers whose works I survey, al-Mufīd was the first to include a lengthy exposition of the Karbalāʾ tragedy. He devotes around fifteen percent of *Kitab al-irshād* to the event—far more space than is allotted to any other topic. The Karbalāʾ story is the apex of his work, and his treatment of it is perhaps his most important contribution to the genre. Al-Mufīd's powerful narrative of the event draws mainly upon the writings of Kūfan traditionist, Abū Mikhnāf,[16] with added portions from other sources. Abū Mikhnāf, like other early writers on the events of Karbalāʾ, wrote from an anti-Umayyad, pro-Kufan perspective, but one that was not necessarily "Shiʿa" in the later sectarian sense.[17] In his incorporation of this early *maqtal* literature, al-Mufīd introduces a broader retelling of Shiʿi history into the biographies of the imams. Al-Ṭabrisī, Ibn Shahrāshūb, and all other later writers of this genre follow al-Mufīd's lead in this regard. As a result, after al-Mufīd, the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn becomes the emotional focal point of this literature. In the process, the telling of al-Ḥusayn's death account becomes more fully aligned with a specifically Twelver Shiʿi social memory.

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[13] *Iʿlām*, 227-228; *al-Irshād,* II: 27-28 (Eng: 296). The *isnād* here goes through Salmān al-Farsī. As I explain below, we see here also that the issue is not solely about al-Ḥusayn. It is about the entire family, the love they have for each other, and the duty of the believer to participate in that love as well. This is a critical difference between Shiʿism and Christianity. For Christians, the life, work, and death of Jesus is entirely unique. Jesus is the center of creation in a fundamental and unrepeated way. The vision which emerges is the biographies of the imams, however, repeatedly emphasizes the ontological similarity between the imams and the prophets. The uniqueness of al-Ḥusayn is simply the visibility of the reality that is presumed to exist in all of the imams. Devotion to al-Ḥusayn, therefore, is symbolic for devotion to the entire family of the Prophet. See also Dakake, *Charismatic Community,* 121-123.

Many other narratives make a connection between love of the Prophet and love of the other infallibles. See *Ithbāt,* 134; Bursi, *Mashāriq,* 99-102.

[14] Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering,* 148-196; Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace the Origin," 163.

[15] The fact that al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom does not figure prominently in *Ithbāt* and *Dalāʾil* suggests the conceptual link between al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom and the significance of the imamate was a knot that was yet to be firmly tied. For some of the early Shi'i controversies regarding how the death of al-Ḥusayn would be understood, see Douglas Karim Crow, "The Death of al-Ḥusayn b. 'Ali and Early Shi'i Views of the Imamate," *al-Serat* 12, (1986), 71-116.

By al-Mufīd's time (late 10th century), a set of public rituals devoted to the commemoration of ʿĀshūrāʾ had begun to emerge.[18] In keeping with this historical context, his is the first narrative in which we see certain theatrical components that are also contained in later works of this type.[19] *Al-Irshād, Iʿlām,* and *Manāqib* each contain a relatively long, continuous "story" of the event which includes dramatic monologues and flamboyant physical gestures by the characters. Furthermore, the accounts feature some of the most jarring displays of body and blood found anywhere in these works. The bodies of al-Ḥusayn and his companions, whole and pure at the outset of the story, are stripped naked, broken, abused, and defiled. The imagery is startling and at times grotesque. For example, the biographers describe the image of al-Ḥusayn's baby son, ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn, being pierced through with an arrow while his father held him on his lap.[20] Al-Ḥusayn's nephew, ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan, had his arm severed and watched it dangle by a piece of skin.[21] The gruesome deaths of one character after another are described, with curses on the tormentors and portrayals of the tears shed by family members accompanying the descriptions.[22] The immoral and barbaric nature of the imam's oppressors is evidenced by accounts of the Umayyad army decapitating the imam and trampling his body under the feet of the cavalry.[23] It is further emphasized by their plundering of the imam's body, the stealing of his clothes and the abandonment of his broken, naked corpse under the desert sun. In one particularly sobering scene, Ibn Ziyād, the Umayyad governor in charge, casually uses a stick to poke at the teeth in the imam's severed head.[24] To similar effect, the unmanly conduct of the enemies is epitomized by their stripping the women of their clothing.[25] One Umayyad officer describes the battle in this way:

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[16] On Abū Mikhnāf, see Ali Bahramian, "Abu Mikhnaf," *DMBI* [tr. Azar Rabbani and Farzin Negahban, *Encyclopedia Islamica*]; Khalil Athamina, "Abu Mikhnaf," EI^3.

[17] Hodgson, "How did the Early Shi'a become Sectarian?," 1-13; Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿashariyya," 521-534; Jafri, *Development,* 211-216. Cf. P. Crone, "Uthmāniyya," EI^2.

[18] Nakash. "An Attempt to Trace the Origin," 161-171. See also Hussain, "Mourning of History," 78-88.

[19] This is not to say that al-Mufīd necessarily envisioned the later ritual development of literal theatrical renditions of the battle at Karbālāʾ (commonly referred to as *taʾzīya*) which seems to have developed until the Safavid period (sources).

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[20] *Al-Irshād,* II: 108 (Eng: 360); *Iʿlām,* 252.

[21] *Al-Irshād,* II: 110 (Eng: 361-362); *Iʿlām,* 253.

[22] As will be discussed further in the next chapter, condemning the enemies and weeping for the family of the Prophet is the reaction which these stories and these works in general are intended to provoke. The reactions of the characters in this narrative are prescriptive as much as they are descriptive.

[23] *Al-Irshād,* II: 113 (Eng: 364); *Iʿlām,* 255.

[24] *Al-Irshād,* II: 114 (364); *Iʿlām,* 255. This level of disrespect for an imam's body is too repulsing to go un-rebuked, however. In this case, Zayd b. Arqam scolds the governors, saying, "Take your cane away from those lips. For, by God, other than whom there is no deity, I have seen the lips of the Apostle of God, may

> It was nothing but the slaughtering of animals.... There were their naked bodies, their blood-stained clothes, their faces thrown in the dust. The sun burst down on them; the wind scattered (dust) over them; their visitors were (scavenging) eagles and vultures.[26]

The most pervasive image in these accounts is blood. It is a major component even in narratives set in earlier times that foreshadow Karbalāʾ. Each of the biographers includes an account in which Umm Salāma (one of the Prophet's wives) recalls being given a clod of dried, red dirt by the Prophet, who explained to her that it is made of al-Ḥusayn's blood at Karbalāʾ. On the day of al-Ḥusayn's death, the blood in that dirt flowed fresh, a sign to Umm Salāmā that the Prophet's grandson has died.[27]

God bless him and his family, touch those lips countless times" : *al-Irshād,* II: 114 (364-365); *Iʿlām,* 255. See also Jafri, *Origins,* 193.

[25] *Al-Irshād,* II: 112 (363). Similar to the discussion of al-Bāqir's masculinity in the last chapter, here too we see a deliberate attempt to denigrate the humanity of the enemy by portraying them in grossly un-heroic/unmanly ways. Imam al-Ḥusayn, in contrast, and despite his ultimate demise, is remembered in these texts for his courageous and unparalleled fighting. *Ithbāt* say the imam killed 1,800 Umayyad soldiers before succumbing to death himself (168).

[26] *Al-Irshād,* II: 118 (367-368). Ayoub discusses other versions of this narration: *Redemptive Suffering,* 137.

[27] *Ithbāt,* 165-166; *Dalāʾil,* 73; *al-Irshād,* II: 129-130 (375-376); *Iʿlām,* 225-226; *Manāqib* IV: 62-63. This is apparently in Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt* and Aḥmad's *Musnad*. In some accounts, Muḥammad went on a night journey to Karbālāʾ where he got the dirt. In other accounts, the angel Gabriel brought the dirt clod to the Prophet.

Another regularly repeated story is about Umm al-Faḍl bt. al-Ḥārith. After having a nightmare about piece of the Prophet's flesh falling into her lap, she tells Muḥammad about the dream. He informs her that this was a vision of his yet-to-be born grandson, al-Ḥusayn, who will be born into her lap. See *Dalāʾil,* 73; *al-Irshād,* II: 129 (375). Cf. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering,* 74. The account highlights the point made in the last chapter that the bodies of the imams and the Prophet are presented as one substance.

Dreams, visions, and other miracles like this serve to incorporate a larger cast of characters than would otherwise be possible into the story of al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom, and blood imagery is a symbolic link that strengthens the ties between the foreshadowing accounts and the stories of the tragedy. In the battle itself, blood imagery takes on apocalyptic proportions. Beyond the expected references to blood in the description of nearly every person killed at Karbalāʾ, we learn that the very heavens wept blood on that day. Al-Ṭabrisī's account says, "when al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (peace be on them) was killed, the sky rained blood. It, along with everything around us, became full of blood."[28] In other accounts, people in distant cities claim to have found fresh blood under every stone.[29] The sky and the earth literally suffered under the grief of this tragedy.[30]

Given the centrality of Karbalāʾ to Shiʿism and the story of the imamate, it should be made clear that the collective biographies of the imams are not, at a fundamental level, about al-Ḥusayn or the events at Karbalāʾ. Some recent scholarship portrays the "Karbalāʾ paradigm" as the encapsulation of the essence of Shiʿism. Such a view of Shiʿism, however, actually obscures the relationship between al-

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[28] *Iʿlām,* 227. *Dalāʾil* contains a similar narrative (72), though the other previous biographers simply contained reports that the sky was red: *Ithbat,* 167-168; *al-Irshād,* II: 132 (377). But Ibn Shahrāshūb follow's al-Ṭabrisī's lead and has even more reports of the sky raining blood, including descriptions of the valleys becoming flooded with the blood (*Manāqib,* IV:61-69,94).

[29] *Iʿlām,* 226. Cf. *Dalāʾil,* 72.

[30] It is also regularly said that he sky wept (sometimes with blood) on that day: *Ithbāt,* 167-168); *Manāqib,* IV: 61. The imagery evokes Sūrat al-Dukhān (44):29.

Ḥusayn/Karbalāʾ and the other imams. A broader consideration of Shiʿi ideas related to the imamate requires us to look beyond al-Ḥusayn.

In the biographies, the drama of al-Ḥusayn's betrayal exists in reciprocal relationship with the fate of the other infallibles/imams. On the one hand, the brutal treatment of the Prophet's grandson sets the emotional tone for the collective story, and those who precede and post-date the Karbalāʾ tragedy participate in the suffering and mourning of this event.[31] As such, the betrayal marks out the parameters of a division within the larger Muslim community that is presumed to span all of history. As the popular saying goes, "Every day is ʿĀshūrāʾ, every land is Karbalāʾ."[32] Those who betray al-Ḥusayn are identified with those who later deny the other imams.[33]

On the other hand, al-Ḥusayn's death derives meaning from its literary context. Within the collective biographies of the imams, al-Ḥusayn's pure character and pious intentions are secured by the qualities of the other infallibles—by the category of personhood in which he is placed. Thus, in the biographies, al-Ḥusayn's story is freed from the anti-Umayyad confines of Abu Mikhnāf's *Maqtal* and given broader significance. ʿĀshūrāʾ ceases to be a story about how a particular government or group of immoral people abused their power. Rather, it becomes a story about the "enemies" of the Prophet in all time periods and how "they" treat "us" (those who love the Prophet). Putting al-Ḥusayn's biography alongside those of the other imams transforms his death into a statement about the universal significance of the imamate for all Muslims.[34] His martyrdom becomes more than a call for all people to mourn him. It is an admonishment to all those who care about the Prophet to love (and grieve the fate of) all twelve imams.[35]

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[31] See next chapter, especially. This is discussed at length by Ayoub.

[32] Or, as Douglas Crow has summarized, "For the Shi'a, all of history is stained by the blood spilt at Karbala": "The Death of al-Ḥusayn," 71.

[33] This is seen played out in certain historical performances of the *taʾzīya.* Shireen Mahdavi mentions that *taʾzīya* was performed in memory of all the imams, not just al-Ḥusayn: "Amusement in Qajar Iran," Iranian Studies 40, no. 4 (2007), 485-486.

IV.B. The Original Betrayal: Muḥammad's Mantle

Like the battle of Karbalāʾ, the denial of Muḥammad's dying wishes—specifically his attempt to appoint ʿAlī as his successor—is one of the defining scenes in the narrative arc of the biographies. Not surprisingly, each of the authors upon whose work this study focuses provides precise details about how the Prophet was betrayed in this regard.[36] Even al-Mufīd, whose *Kitab al-irshād* begins with ʿAlī's biography (i.e. - without a delineated biography of the Prophet), devotes significant attention to this event. According to each of the authors, the prophet gave clear instructions on multiple occasions that ʿAlī should be his successor as leader of the community of believers (*amīr al-muʾminīn*). The single most important instance of this—and the most widely attested in a variety of early Muslim sources—is a speech the Prophet gave at *Ghadīr Khumm,*[37] on his way back from *hajj* in the final months of his life. There, say Shiʿi (and many non-Shiʿi) sources, the Prophet was told by the angel Gabriel that the time had come to reveal his successor to the people. God's word came down to Muḥammad at that moment, saying, "O Messenger, announce that which has been revealed to you from your Lord."[38] As al-Ṭabrisī recounts,

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[34] Crow rightly adds, "al-Ḥusayn's death functioned as one basic point of clarification for the roles of suffering, intercession, and apocalyptic retribution peculiar to the *imam*": "The Death of al-Ḥusayn," 73.

[35] The discursive connection between this literature and the production of a particular religious identity is also seen with reference to particular Shiʿi rituals. Al-Mufīd records a narrative, for example, which neatly ties together the Prophet's legacy, al-Ḥusayn's martyrdom (though here the plural suggests the al-Ḥusayn is speaking on behalf of all of the imams), the faithful community, and the practice of tomb visitation: (367). The topic of visiting al-Ḥusayn's grave appears in the other works as well: *Dalāʾil,* 73; *Manāqib* IV:138-139. See also Sindawi, "Visit to the Tomb of al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī in Shiite Poetry: First to Fifth Centuries AH (8th-11th Centuries CE)," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37, no. 2 (2006): 230-258.

[36] *Ithbāt,* 123-126; *al-Irshād,* I: 7-9, 175-195 (3-5, 123-137); *Iʿlām,* 44-151; *Manāqib,* I:290-302. The *Dalāʾil* was unlikely an exception, but the early portion of the work is not extant so there are no means by which this can be verified.

> [Muḥammad] then took hold of ʿAlī's two arms and lifted them high until people could see his white underarms. He said: "Of whomever I am the master, ʿAlī is his master. O Allāh, befriend those who are loyal to him, and be an enemy to those who are hostile towards him. Grant support to those who support him, and abandon those who abandon him!"[39]

Those present, including 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, came forward and pledged their allegiance to ʿAlī, congratulated him, and addressed him as *amīr al-muʾminīn.* The authors' assumptions about the perspicuity of Muḥammad's intent are made apparent by their prominent inclusion of this narrative in the biographies. This *Ghadīr Khumm* story is typically followed by an emotive description of the final moments of the Prophet's life.

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[37] On *Ghadīr Khumm* and the sources on the Prophet's speech, see Donaldson, *Shi'ite Religion,* 1-13; L. Veccia Valieri, "G͟hadīr K͟humm," EI^2; Madelung, *Succession,* 253; Dakake, *Charismatic Community,* 33-48.

[38] Sūrat al-Māʾida (5): 67 [decide on translation preference].

[39] *Iʿlām,* 145 (translation by Ayoub and Clarke, 206). Cf. *al-Irshād,* I: 175-176 (124).

Several biographers recall that when the Prophet was on his deathbed, he feebly asked those present to send for his "brother" and "companion." ʿĀʾisha claimed he meant Abū Bakr, her father, and she had him come. But as he approached, the Prophet turned his head and repeated the original request. Ḥafsa, another wife of the Prophet, interjected that he must have intended for them to call her father, ʿUmar. But when ʿUmar was summoned, the Prophet turned his head away once again, saying again that he wanted his brother and companion. Finally, Umm Salāma spoke up, saying the Prophet meant ʿAlī. When ʿAlī was summoned, the Prophet spoke privately to him for a long time. ʿAlī remained there with Muḥammad until he died. At the Prophet's request, he died with his head in ʿAlī's lap, and as Muḥammad's spirit departed from him, ʿAlī wiped his face with it.[40] This last point stands in stark contrast to mainstream Sunni narratives which generally remember the Prophet dying in ʿĀʾisha's lap.[41]

This story is an emotionally compelling protest against the grand betrayal of the Prophet of God. ʿĀʾisha and Ḥafsa, beloved wives of Muḥammad, shamelessly tried to secure their own interests when the Prophet was at his most vulnerable (see more below on female betrayal). And two of Muḥammad's closest friends, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, though passive in this narrative, are presented in other stories as aggressively manipulating the situation and disobeying the Prophet in order to snatch power for themselves.[42] In several accounts collected by the imams' biographers, Muḥammad made multiple attempts to clarify his wishes, at one point even asking for a pen so that he could write his will down,[43] but those closest to him repeatedly denied him.

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[40] *Al-Irshād,* I: 186 (132-133); *Iʿlām,* 148-149 (212-213); *Manāqib,* I: 293-294.

[41] Example: Ibn Isḥaq, *The Life of Muhammad,* 682.

Within the framework of these biographies, the betrayal of the Prophet is the betrayal of the entire imamate. It symbolizes the fate of the Shiᶜa and initiates the dispossession of the imams from their rightful authority. In the meta-narrative of sacred history constructed by the authors, all problems in the Muslim community can be traced to this betrayal, which becomes a kind of "fall" of the *ummah.*[44] This is communicated only implicitly in the early biographies, but it is expressed more explicitly in subsequent centuries. A popular saying among Shiᶜi preachers today—one that is found in Majlisī's *Bihār al-anwār*—goes, "al-Ḥusayn was killed on the day of Ṣaqīfa."[45] Ṣaqīfa was the infamous portico under which Abū Bakr and ᶜUmar vied for their authority over the community while ᶜAlī was busy attending to the duty of washing the deceased body of Muḥammad.[46] By saying al-Ḥusayn was killed on the day of Saqīfa, Majlisī and countless preachers since link the Prophet's fate with the fate of all the imams.[47] Perhaps more importantly, this saying asserts that the enemies of the Prophet and the enemies of the imams are one and the same.[48] These accounts make clear the boundaries of the community: "we" are those who have truly loved the Prophet. "They" betrayed him and his family.

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[42] *Al-Irshād,* I: 183-184 (130); *Iᶜlām,* 147 (210).

[43] *Al-Irshād,* I: 184 (130-131); *Iᶜlām,* 147-148 (210-211). Ibn Shahrāshūb, in his account of this event, cites Ibn ᶜAbbās saying that this was "the most disastrous thing to happen to the Prophet": *Manāqib,* I: 292-293.

[44] In one tradition attributed to Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ, once Abū Bakr seized the caliphate, there "was an earthquake that only ᶜAlī could stop": cited in Soufi, "The Image," 71 (from *Dalāʾil*).

[45] Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Risālah-ʾi Sih Aṣl: Bi-inz̤imām-i Muntakhab-i Mas̱navī Va Rubāyīyāt-i ū*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Dānishkadah-ʾi ʻUlūm-i Maʻqūl va Manqūl, 1340), 122 [thanks to Ata Anzali for this reference]. Crow also discusses this topic, providing a quote from Ayatollah Khomeini as well: "The Death of al-Ḥusayn," 71-72. Crow also discusses this topic, providing a quote from Ayatollah Khomeini as well: "The Death of al-Ḥusayn," 71-72.

IV.C. A Tradition of Betrayal: the Appointment of Imam al-Riḍá

The biographers fundamentally assume that the fates of all the infallibles are ontologically interconnected. The gripping events of Karbalāʾ and the transparent grab for power at Ṣaqīfa function as symbolic examples of the kind of betrayal the "enemies" have committed (and will always commit) against the imams and their followers. Treachery becomes logically necessary, and the way this logic plays itself out in the story of Imam al-Riḍá sheds further light on enduring patterns of how the "enemies" are portrayed and conceived. The betrayal of al-Riḍá is particularly poignant, for it is his life that comes closest to unsettling the presumed boundary between Sunni and Shiʿa in the biographies.

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[46] On Saqīfa, see Jafri, *Origins,* 27-57; G. Lacomte, "al-Saḳīfa," EI^2; Madelung, *Succession,* 28-56, 356-363.

[47] This has been a theme throughout this study, the consistent reiteration of the connection between the imams and the Prophet.

[48] Cf. al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyāt al-abrār*, 111-117.

The ʿAbbāsid revolution against the Umayyads in 750 CE is a fascinating turn of events in early Islamic history.[49] A movement which seems to have had its origins in Merv (in northern Khurāsān) was able to strategically (if only temporarily) unite a wide spectrum of anti-Umayyad sentiments. Persian *mawālī* (foreign converts to Islam) and a range of proto-Shiʿi groups who favored the idea of tying leadership more closely to the Prophet's clan/family were among the most important supporters of the movement (both had been largely excluded from Umayyad institutions of power). An ambiguous commitment to establish the rule of "the approved member of Muḥammad's family" (*al-riḍá min al Muḥammad*) proved to be sufficient foundation for a successful revolution. In many ways, the ʿAbbāsid revolution was a Shiʿi revolution at a time when Shiʿism existed on a spectrum rather than in a category. The initial ʿAbbāsid policies appeased and satisfied many constituents and charted a middle ground where ʿAlī was not cursed and the Prophet's family was honored (theoretically, at least), but where the first three *Rāshidūn* caliphs were also given respect. Many of the followers of the Shiʿi imams were given significant freedom of expression, but the imams of the twelver tradition did not emerge as political leaders. That is, not until the eighth imam, ʿAlī b. Mūsá al-Riḍá, was appointed heir to the caliphate by al-Maʾmūn in 201/817. The seventh ʿAbbāsid caliph, al-Maʾmūn (r. 198-218/813-833),[50] attempted to align the ʿAbbāsid family with the ʿAlid loyalists in various ways, and the appointment of al-Riḍá to the caliphate/imamate was apparently intended to secure a complete transition of power to the descendants of the Prophet.[51] However, al-Riḍá died in 203/818 before that transition of power could occur. Shiʿi sources claim that he was betrayed by the caliph and poisoned at his directive.[52]

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[49] On the ʿAbbāsid revolution, see Patricia Crone, "On the meaning of the ʿAbbāsid call to al-Riḍā," in *The Islamic world: Essays in honor of Bernard Lewis*, eds. Clifford Edmund Bosworth et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 95–111; M. A. Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners from the East: The Establishment of the ʿAbbāsid State: Incubation of a Revolt* (Leiden: Brill, 1983); Jacob Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory: An Inquiry into the Art of ʿAbbāsid Apologetics*, (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1986); Ṣāliḥ Saʿīd Āghā, *The Revolution that Toppled the Umayyads: Neither Arab nor ʿAbbāsid* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Daniel Elton, "ʿAbbāsid Revolution," EI^3.

From the perspective of the biographers, Imam al-Riḍá's life serves as a clear proof of the true nature of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate. Al-Maʾmūn's betrayal is all the more perfidious because of the sharply divergent nature between what he appeared to be, and what he turned out to be. This gives al-Riḍá's story great didactic value, for it sharpens perceptions of the treacherous nature of the social order. The ʿAbbāsid caliph appointed al-Riḍá as his heir to the throne, raising the hopes and expectations of his followers that the moment of justice had come, only to have him killed. Ibn Jarīr speaks of this dramatic turnaround in *Dalāʾil:*

> [al-Ma'mun] minted coins with [Imam al-Riḍá's] name on them—these were known as "Riḍá coins" (*al-dirāhim al-raḍīya*). [al-Maʾmūn] gathered the ʿAbbāsid clan together and argued with them. He

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[50] On al-Maʾmūn, see Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography,* 24-69; Micahel Cooperson, *al-Ma'mun* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005).

[51] For a recent historical analysis of this fascinating moment, see Tor, "An historiographical re-examination," 103–128.

[52] See *Ithbāt,* 214-216; *al-Irshād,* II: 269-270 (Eng: 477-478); *Dalāʾil,* 174-180; *Iʿlām,* 337-341; *Manāqib,* IV:394-407.

> compelled them to accept his reasoning and espoused the merits of al-Riḍá and returned Fadak to the son of Fāṭima. But then later he betrayed him and thought about his murder (*thumma ghadara bihi wa-fakara fī qatlihi*). And then he killed him in Ṭūs in Khurāsān.[53]

Al-Maʾmūn's culpability in the death of al-Riḍá is unquestioned in the Shiʿi biographies. This assumption stands in contrast with some Sunni sources, which claim that al-Riḍá simply died of overeating grapes.[54] Such a suggestion would not simply be distasteful to the biographers; it becomes increasingly unthinkable within this genre. It creates no meaningful sense within the larger story.[55] But while the murder of al-Riḍá is presumed as certain fact, other aspects of the story are uncertain, obscured in the shadows of this narrative.

Two major questions are implicit in this whole affair to which the biographers tend to try to give clarity. First, why would the ʿAbbāsid caliph appoint al-Riḍá as his heir, only to betray him later?[56] Second, why would the imam accept the appointment? Each of the biographers offers reports which seem designed to address these matters. In regards to the caliph's motives, the more detailed biographies provide stories which illustrate the transition from genuine respect for the imam to a jealous anger at the imam.[57] In some cases, al-Riḍá's boldness in correcting al-Maʾmūn's behavior is presented as the event that led al-Maʾmūn to hate the imam.[58] Al-Riḍá's motives are more opaque. By the time these biographies were being systemized into a new form in the 10th century, the end of the story had already been written, and assumptions about the imams' fate on earth were crystalizing. Thus, when our authors wrote, the possibility of an imam attaining the powerful position the Shiʿa claim is deserved is actually more problematic than a betrayal. In keeping with this conception, al-Riḍá is portrayed as resistant and reluctant to accept the designation of heir to the caliphate.[59] Moreover, the larger story is predicated on the assumption that al-Riḍá knew the event would not actually come to pass.[60] Essentially, in the biographers' accounts, al-Riḍá's accepts merely to call al-Maʾmūn's bluff. The ability to frame an opaque piece of history in such a coherent fashion, however, is a privilege reserved for generations removed from the messy immediacy of events—generations whose distance allows the construction of a narrative in accordance with the emerging vision of the history of the imams.

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[53] *Dalāʾil,* 174.

[54] Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography,* 74.

[55] The assumption that al-Maʾmūn had a role in al-Riḍá's death was apparently an early rumor, but not universally accepted by the Shiʿi, at least not initially. Cooperson notes that both Yaʿqūbī and al-Kulaynī do not appear to presume al-Maʾmūn's involvement: *Classical Arabic Biography,* 90. But the biographers in this study all believe al-Maʾmūn had al-Riḍá murdered. The significance of this will be explored in the next chapter.

[56] I am, of course, looking at how this question is answered by the biographers at hand. For a contemporary historian's approach to this question, see Tor, "An historiographical re-examination," 103–128.

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[57] *Al-Irshād,* II: 259-271 (Eng: 469-478); *Iʿlām,* 332-341; *Manāqib,* IV: 394-407.

[58] *Al-Irshād,* II: 269-271 (Eng: 477-478); *Iʿlām,* 337. Core portions of al-Mufid's narrative here, and thus the subsequent authors, draws from Isfahani, *Maqātil,* 566.

[59] *Al-Irshād,* II: 259-260 (Eng: 469-470); *Iʿlām,* 332; *Manāqib,* IV: 398-399. See also Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography,* 73-74.

[60] Knowledge of their fates is characteristic of all the imams. In this case, see *Ithbāt,* 209-211; *al-Irshād,* II: 191-192 (417-419); Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography,* 84.

The story of al-Riḍá plays an important role in the meta-narrative being shaped about the lives of the imams. It removes all doubt about the true nature of the ʿAbbāsids and streamlines historical complexities. Notably, it puts the ʿAbbāsid caliphate into the same category as the pretenders to leadership before them. They are equally hell-bound, totally "other." Al-Riḍá's father, Imam al-Kāẓim, said, "whoever wrongs the right of this son of mine and denies his Imamate after me is like those who wronged ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, peace be on him, and denied his right after the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family."[61]

IV.D. "A Woman Who Poisons her Husbands": the Wife of Imam al-Ḥasan

When Imam al-Ḥasan died, his brother and inheritor of the imamate, al-Ḥusayn, assumed the burial responsibilities. In a story recounted in each of the main collections, al-Ḥusayn's attempt to fulfill the dying wish of his brother is thwarted by ʿĀʾisha, the infamously young, beloved wife of the Prophet and daughter of Abū Bakr. Al-Ḥasan had desired to be buried next to his grandfather, the Prophet Muḥammad, but that particular burial site was part of the property on which ʿĀʾisha still lived. As al-Ḥusayn approached with the funeral party, ʿĀʾisha mounted a mule and positioned herself in a way that prevented any attempt to use that space for al-Ḥasan's burial. A verbal altercation between al-Ḥusayn and ʿĀʾisha ensued. Eventually, at the other dying request of al-Ḥasan—not to shed blood over the issue—al-Ḥusayn lead the party to the burial site of Fāṭima al-Zaḥrāʾ, their mother.[62] And there lies the grave of the second imam.

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[61] *Al-Irshād,* II: 253 (Eng: 465).

This brief story, told in different levels of detail, is another instance in the imams' biographies when an account is made memorable through its planting in a field of highly contested symbols. Sectarian discourses flourish in such an environment, and the narrative of al-Ḥasan's burial reflects a polarized debate over religious identity and serves to entrench those identities. The level of culpability ascribed to ʿĀʾisha in these accounts varies. In some versions, she is the only person who stands in the way of the deceased imam's wishes.[63] In other versions, she is encouraged by the Umayyad governor of Medina (and future caliph), Marwān I (d. 65/685),[64] to block the path of al-Ḥusayn.[65] But in all cases, her presence is central. It sets up the most memorable line of this story—found in every account—when Ibn ʿAbbās mockingly criticizes ʿĀʾisha by saying, "What mischief you bring about, one day on a mule and one day on a camel!"[66] This accusation is both humorous and tragic, reminding the audience of ʿĀʾisha's role in leading the community of believers into civil war against Imam ʿAlī at the "Battle of the Camel" (named for the camel upon which ʿĀʾisha sat and watched).[67] For the biographers of the imams, ʿĀʾisha represents the type of person who harbors ill-intent toward the imams. Her proximity to the Prophet only highlights her condemnation, and that of those who would follow in her path. In al-Mufīd's account, Ibn ʿAbbās goes on to say to ʿĀʾisha, "Do you want to extinguish the light of God and fight the friends (*awlīyāʾ*) of God?... By God, victory will come to this house, even if it is after some time."[68]

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[62] See *Ithbāt,* 163; *al-Irshād,* II: 18-19 (Eng, 288-289); *Dala'il,* 68-70; *Iʿlām,* 219-220; *Manāqib,* IV:50. Various versions of this story are also found in numerous early and classical sources: Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Maqātil al-ṭālibyīn*, edited by Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabīya, 1368 [1949]), 72.

[63] See *Ithbāt,* 163.

[64] On Marwan I, see C. E. Bosworth, "Marwān I b. al-Ḥakam," EI^2.

[65] See *al-Irshād,* II: 18-19 (Eng: 288-289); *Dalāʾil,* 68-70; *Iʿlām,* 219-220; *Manāqib,* IV:50.

[66] A variation of this line is also found in slightly different contexts: see Spellberg, *Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past,* 114-119.

Distrust of—and even disdain for—some of the Prophet's wives, particularly ʿĀʾisha, is not an uncommon feature of early and classical Shiʿi writings.[69] Sunni and Shiʿi narratives seem to indicate a significant amount of bad blood between ʿĀʾisha and ʿAlī even during the Prophet's lifetime.[70] Among the well-known examples: when ʿĀʾisha's sexual fidelity to Muḥammad had come into question by some, ʿAlī is said to have counseled the Prophet to divorce her.[71] Whether disputes such as this reflect a genuine early rift between ʿĀʾisha and ʿAlī or whether later generations contrived such tales to reinforce their own version of events (perhaps in the wake of the better-attested Battle of the Camel) is impossible to say for certain; but in either case, the effect on their legacies is the same.[72] Shiʿi sources regularly cast ʿĀʾisha as a suspect character with sinister motives. The biographies of the imams, specifically, rarely pass on an opportunity to criticize, and even deride, ʿĀʾisha.[73] Her role as wife of the Prophet does not protect her from the collective antipathy of the Shiʿi community, rather it sets her up for it. Furthermore, ʿĀʾisha's hyper-sexual legacy plays heavily into the complex set of gendered assumptions underlining this section of Imami literature.[74]

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[67] On the Battle of the Camel, see Madelung, *Succession,* 141-183; L. Veccia Vaglieri, "al-Dj̲amal," EI^2; Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past,* 101-132.

[68] *Al-Irshād,* II: 18-19 (Eng: 289).

[69] Wadad Qadi, for instance, mentions this in relationship to al-Himyari, and early Shiʿi poet: "al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyārī," EI^2.

[70] This is given an excellent discussion by Denise Spellberg in *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, passim.

[71] Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, 69-70. 'A'isha is understood by Sunni Muslims to have been vindicated from the charge of infidelity by *Sūrat al-nūr* (24):11.

As this study has already indicated, the biographies of the imams regularly portray the female body as a site of mistrust and fear. Many women garner the praise of the biographers, but they do so by fulfilling one of a limited number of sanctified roles allotted to them. Their merit is expressed primarily through their status as mother or daughter of an imam; notably, ʿĀʾisha is neither and she does not bear any children. The biographies, therefore, reflect and enforce specifically gendered values. In basing the praise of women almost exclusively on their connection to the imams, the stories promote and provide the theological underpinning for an androcentric paradigm of human destiny. As noted in the previous chapter, the woman whom the biographers elevate most highly (Fāṭima) is simultaneously and radically reconfigured such that her connection to her sexual organs is completely obscured. The bifurcation of the value system according to gender in the biographies becomes even more apparent when the roles of imams' wives are considered.

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[72] As for their contrasting of legacies, Spellberg's work here again succeeds in explaining the significance of the evolution of those stories, particularly in her contrast of ʿĀʾisha and Fāṭima's legacies: *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, 151-190.

[73] In one frequently recounted story, Imam Mūsá al-Kāẓim speaks (while still an infant) to a visitor and instructs him to change the name of his recently born daughter. The daughter had been named al-Ḥumayrāʾ, which was another name for ʿĀʾisha. The infant imam tells the man that God hates that name: *Ithbāt,* 191; *al-Irshād,* II: 219 (Eng: 438-439); *Manāqib,* IV: 312.

In another particularly interesting (though entirely unique, as far as I am aware) account, the writer of *Ithbāt* claims that while al-Ḥusayn argued with ʿĀʾisha about the burial of al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn "divorced" ʿĀʾisha. The text claims that Muḥammad had passed on the right to divorce his wives to his heirs. This right—presumably a symbolic gesture rather than having any legal ramifications—was passed on all the way to al-Ḥusayn who then divorced ʿĀʾisha on this occasion. The text goes on to claim that the Prophet had said that one of his wives would be divorced by his descendants and that this woman would not see him in paradise: 163.

[74] On the sexualized nature of ʿĀʾisha's legacy, see again Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, 161-165.

The wives of the imams have physical, emotional, legal, and even religious ties to the imams. But these marital bonds, unlike the blood ties between the imams and their mothers and daughters/sisters, are not enough to secure the wives a favorable legacy within the biographies. The marriage relationship appears to be critically different, and not simply in regards to legal issues such as rights and inheritance. At a fundamental conceptual level, wives do not participate in the divine plan and are not included in the chosen family, the *ahl al-bayt.* The wife remains an outsider until she attains the elevated role of mother of an imam's child. Through childbirth the wife is redeemed, at least with regards to her portrayal within this literature. Tellingly, only the wives (and concubines) of the imams who bear them children are named within the biographies. The rest are forgotten. The only exceptions to this rule are those wives who murder their husbands. And with striking consistency, those murderous wives do not bear children for the imams.

The spiritual distancing of the man from the marital bond goes hand in hand with the inclusion of criticisms of some of the Prophet's wives (most notably ʿĀʾisha), which sets a pattern that allows certain wives of the imams to be blamed for treacherous and murderous acts. Such blame emphasizes the physical and sexual bond the wife has with the husband. Whereas Fāṭima and other holy women are separated from their sexual performances, the sexuality of deceptive wives is amplified.

The biographers of the imams inherit and build upon an array of known literary motifs found in late-antique and early medieval storytelling. Tropes of the deceptive wife, the jealous wife, and the "killer wife" are ubiquitous in Near Eastern literatures of the period.[75] In the case of the biographies of the imams, the deceptive wife motif is connected to another common motif: poisoning. As will be discussed in the next chapter, that an imam might die a natural death, or die of unknown causes, becomes increasingly inconceivable. Thus, poisoning provides a reasonable and memorable way to plug holes in the death narratives of the imams. Most Shiʿi accounts list poison to be the cause of death for nine of the twelve imams (plus the Prophet). In at least two of those cases—though sometimes more—a deceptive wife is believed to have done the poisoning. It is nearly universally agreed that Imam al-Ḥasan and Imam al-Jawād were poisoned by their wives. I will discuss the case of al-Jawād in the next chapter and return here to the story of al-Ḥasan, whose burial was disturbed by ʿĀʾisha and whose death by poison serves as an archetype for subsequent poisoning narratives.

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[75] See, for example, Mordechai A. Friedman, "Tamar, A Symbol of Life: The "Killer Wife" Superstition in the Bible and Jewish Tradition," *AJS Review* 15, 1 (Spring, 1990): 23-61; Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Reading 'Wiles of Women' Stories as Fictions of Masculinity," in *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, edited by Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, 147-168 (London: Saqi Books, 2000); Margaret A. Mills, "Whose Best Tricks? Makr-i zan as a Topos in Persian Oral Literature," *Iranian Studies* 32, 2 (Spring, 1999): 261-270; Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Reading: And Enjoying: 'Wiles of Women' Storeis as a Feminist," *Iranian Studies* 32, 2 (Spring 1999): 203-222; Margaret A. Mills, "The Gender of the Trick: Female Tricksters and Male Narrators," *Asian Folklore Studies* 60, 2 (2001): 237-258.

As was often the case, al-Mufīd's narrative of al-Ḥasan's death did much to set the standard for later Shiʿi retellings.[76] He based his account extensively on al-Isfahāni's narrative in *Maqātil al-ṭālibiyīn.*[77] Al-Mufīd makes it clear that al-Muʿāwīya, the Umayyad Caliph with whom al-Ḥasan made a treaty following Imam ʿAlī's death, chose to openly betray that agreement. Among other manifestations of Muʿāwīya's malice toward *ahl al-bayt*, such as instituting the public cursing of ʿAlī, Muʿāwīya eventually set in motion a plan to have al-Ḥasan killed. The caliph had decided to hand over the reign of the empire over to his son, Yazīd, and so Muʿāwīya contacted one of al-Ḥasan's wives, Jaʿda bt. al-Ashʿath b. Qays. With the promise of 100,000 dirhams and a pledge to marry her to his son Yazīd, Muʿāwīya persuaded Jaʿda to give al-Ḥasan a poisonous drink which killed him after a forty-day period of lingering sickness. Al-Mufīd also relates an account of the event which clarifies that while Muʿāwīya did pay Jaʿda the promised money, he did not fulfill his promise to marry her to Yazīd and instead married her to "a man from the family of Ṭalḥa."[78]

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[76] See *al-Irshād,* II: 13-17 (Eng: 285-288). Cf *Ithbāt,* 162; *Dalāʾil,* 68-70; *Iʿlām,* 214; *Manāqib,* IV: 34, 47-48.

[77] See Al-Isfahāni, *Maqātil,* 72-77.

In each the Shiᶜi biographers' account, the real blame lies with the caliph. Jaᶜda is merely a tool, a relatively inconsequential character who warrants no more than a passing gloss. The author of the *Ithbāt* does not mention her at all and refers to Muᶜāwīya as Ibn Akila al-Akkād ("son of the liver-eater")[79]—a reference to Muᶜāwīya's infamous mother, Hind bt. ᶜUtba, whom has been widely remembered (in Sunni and Shiᶜi sources) for eating the liver of Ḥamza b. ᶜAbd al-Muṭṭalib at the battle field of Uhud. Stripping the agency from Jaᶜda further dehumanizes her, as her voice is cast not simply as irreverent, but as irrelevant.[80] Furthermore, by placing the poisoning of al-Ḥasan in the context of the dispute over leadership of the community, the significance of this event is framed and the motivations are delimited. Absent from the account entirely are references to any other possible motivations Jaᶜda, or anyone else for that matter, could have had for killing al-Ḥasan. This is particularly interesting when considering the accusations among some later Sunni writers that al-Ḥasan was a "habitual divorcer" (*miṭlāq*).[81] Some accounts claim he married and divorced as many as ninety women, though sixteen appears to be the highest number of names produced for the women he supposedly married.[82] The biographers in this study make no attempt to include this issue into the equation. Like the childless (and thus nameless) wives themselves, al-Ḥasan's marital proclivities simply did not figure into the account in any meaningful way. In a system constructed around assumptions about male leadership and the denial of the imams' rightful place of authority, Muʿāwīya's political motivations provide the most sensible explanation.

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[78] *Al-Irshād,* II: 16 (Eng: 287).

[79] *Ithbāt,* 162.

[80] Similarly, as will be mentioned in the next chapter, Umm al-Faḍl, the murderous wife of Imam al-Jawād, was also a disposable pawn in a match between men.

[81] Madelung discusses these accusations in some detail in *Succession to Muhammad,* 380-387.

The story of Jaʿda's murder of al-Ḥasan, along with the way in which this story typically runs directly into the burial account and al-Ḥusayn's confrontation with ʿĀʾisha, provides an excellent place to reflect on the cultural assumptions about gender, family, community, and sexuality which influence the way the stories are told. We can see, for instance, that the portrayals of the wives of the imams differ very little from the portrayals of their concubines. In both cases, the women remain nameless and absent unless they bear the imams children. Marriage, in the context of these stories, does not necessarily entail a bond of trust, companionship, or even inclusion into the religious community.[83] Those bonds *are* consistently assumed, however, in the cases of the mothers and daughters of the imams.

Accounts such as these show us the extent to which public discourse, slander in particular, is highly gendered. The primary goal of the Jaʿda narrative in the murder of al-Ḥasan is peripheral. The intent is to attack Muʿāwīya and other male enemies of *ahl*

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[82] Madelung, *Succession,* 385-387.

[83] Mahdjoub talks about the Shiʿi tendency to scapegoat the wives of good men: "The Evolution of Popular Eulogy," 59.

al-bayt. Muᶜāwīya's inclination to employ secretive and conniving tricks implicitly feminizes the caliphate. His bribery of Jaᶜda parallels Marwān I's manipulation of ᶜĀʾisha, further strengthening the caliphal connection to wily femininity. The *Ithbāt's* derisive tone in referring to him as Ibn Akila al-Akkād is another layer of association with evil women. Muᶜāwīya is not the only man subjected to highly gendered slander in this story. Generations of men who descended from Jaᶜda and her second husband are collectively ridiculed as "sons of a woman who poisons their husbands."[84]

IV.E. Betraying the Masters: the ghulat of Imam al-Ṣādiq

Those who tried to murder and/or usurp the power of the imams are not the only enemies mentioned in the biographies. The authors also place another group—ᶜAlid loyalists known as the exaggerators (*ghulāt*)—outside the imagined boundaries of the Shiᶜi community. In his section against the *ghulāt*, Ibn Shahrāshūb quotes Imam al-Ṣādiq: "The *ghulāt* are an evil among God's creation. They reduce the greatness of God and ascribe lordship to God's servants. Truly the *ghulāt* are given to the evil of the Jews, Christians, Magians, and those who ascribe partners with God."[85]

But who exactly are these exaggerators? And what earned them such criticism? Investigations into this topic have yet to provide firm answers to these questions.[86]

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[84] *Al-Irshād,* II: 16 (Eng: 287); *Manāqib* IV: 48.

[85] *Manāqib*, I: 324.

[86] See M. Hodgson, "Ghulāt," EI^2; Wadād al-Qāḍī, "The Development of the Term *ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya," in *Akten des VII Kongresses für Arabistik und*

Echoing *Sūrat al-nisāʾ* (4): 171, where the Qurʾan reads, "People of the Book, do not exaggerate in your religion" (*yā ahl al-kitāb lā taghlū fī dīnikum*),[87] the term *ghulūw* is universally applied as a term of derision.[88] No known group of people ever accepted this label for themselves. Attempting, then, to identify the religious sect at whom a given mention of the *ghulāt* is directed is a fraught endeavor, and in many ways it seems to be a catch-all pejorative for groups or people with whom one disagreed. Indeed, many (proto)-Sunni figures accused the entire Shiʿi community of such exaggeration. In turn, however, the biographers of the imams adamantly condemn the *ghulāt*. For our Shiʿi authors, *ghulūw* is associated with the elevation of someone to a religious position beyond his rank, whether this took the form of elevating an imam to the level of divinity or elevating a normal person to the level of imam. The legendary story of Ibn Sabaʾ,[89] the archetypal heretic of early Islam, serves as one proof that the imams condemn such beliefs. Ibn Shahrāshūb's account, like many Twelver Shiʿi works, tells of 'Alī ordering Ibn Sabaʾ to be burned to death for his heresy (framed as worshipping ʿAlī

Islamwissenschaft, edited by Albert Dietrich, 86-99 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976) [reprinted in *Shīʿism,* ed. E. Kohlberg, 169-194]; Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Islam,* 216; Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988).

[87] Translation mine. Cf *Sūrat al-Māʾida* (5): 77.

[88] Note on disagreement with Qadi on this issue, but her general helpfulness in pointing to the "variety of significances."

[89] The most extensive investigation of the historicity of the Ibn Sabaʾ legend has recently been provided by Sean Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic*.

as a god). One finds such sayings, which distance the imams from the *ghulāt*, throughout the biographies.[90]

The accounts of Imam al-Ṣādiq have a particularly high ratio of the anti-*ghulūw* comments. This is in accordance with the frequency with which al-Ṣādiq is portrayed in his role as teacher to students who in turn package and transmit the imam's guidance and advice.[91] An example of al-Ṣādiq's opposition to the *ghulāt* is embedded in an account where al-Ṣādiq converts a famed Shiᶜi poet, al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī,[92] to the Shiᶜism of the twelve imams.[93] Al-Ḥimyarī was a follower of the Kaysanīya, a group labeled as *ghulāt* by the Twelver Shiᶜa because they elevated Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīya to the level of imam and believed that he had gone into *ghayba* after his death. Al-Ḥimyarī's affiliation with this group, however, did not prevent his poetry from resonating with the broader Shiᶜi community. His verse was a powerful marker of Shiᶜi social memory and was widely transmitted. Ibn Shahrāshūb, for example, uses al-Ḥimyarī's poetry extensively in *Manāqib.* Al-Ṣādiq's conversion of al-Ḥimyarī serves the useful purpose of bringing a beloved figure within the community of salvation.

Although different in type, *ghulūw* represents another form of betrayal within the biographical narratives. Not all betrayals end in an imam's death, but they nonetheless represent a dangerous rejection of the imams' teachings. As such, all acts of betrayal—whether they comprise a failure to recognize the imams' authority or consist of exaggerating their ontological nature—belong in the same categorical realm of the aberrant "other." Al-Ṣādiq's uncle, ᶜUmar b. ᶜAlī b. al-Ḥusayn, is recorded as saying, "The one who is excessive [*al-mufriṭ*] in his love for us is like the one who is excessive in his hatred for us."[94] By asserting the similarity of excessive love and excessive hate for the Prophet's family, the Shiᶜa are able to position their own vision as the middle way. The *ghulūw* category, therefore, is useful for the Shiᶜa in that it offers an alternate extreme from which they can differentiate themselves.

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[90] See *al-Irshād,* II: 171, 308 (403, 504, respectively); *Iᶜlām,* 287-294,402-403; *Manāqib,* I: 239,323-326, II: 334-339, 364, 375, III: 287, 295, 301, IV: 228, 238-239; al-Fattāl, *Rawḍat,* 269; al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuhaf al-ᶜuqūl,* (Eng: 114-115, 189-190).

[91] See *Irshād,* II: 190-209 (Eng: 417-430); *Iᶜlām,* 284-287.

[92] See Qadi, "al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyārī," EI^2.

[93] *Irshād,* II: 206-207 (Eng: 429-430); *Iᶜlām,* 289-290.

The boundaries between the Twelver Shiᶜa and the *ghulāt* (even if we assume the term to apply only to those at whom our Shiᶜi authors directed it) are obscure and porous. In the same way that the lines dividing Shiᶜa and Sunni were often blurred by the complex beliefs and practices of real people, so too were the distinctions between Shiᶜa and *ghulāt*. These are the boundaries that this literature helps to clarify and reify. This is accomplished within the biographies through creating a normative account for the other group's nature and intent. Yet even as the narrative is becoming increasingly codified, the authors of the biographies—beginning especially with al-Mufīd—incorporate accounts and stories that have their origin among people considered outside the community so long as they fit well into their own overall vision. This is particularly the case with Ibn Shahrāshūb, who draws ambitiously from a wide variety of non-Shiʿi sources. We find him incorporating accounts by *ghulāt* when they suit his purposes, even in the very sections of *Manāqib* where he criticizes the exaggerators. When recalling some miracles performed by Imam ʿAlī, for example, Ibn Shahrāshūb reports several of stories in which ʿAlī is said to have flown through the air—in one of case while riding atop a shield.[95] Ibn Shahrāshūb explicitly states that these accounts come from the *ghulāt*. Yet his desire to convey the stories despite their suspicious origins demonstrates the compatibility of the accounts with the meta-narrative of Ibn Shahrāshūb's biographies. Further, we witness the growth of stories about the imams along socially-dependent contours of expectation. As such, Ibn Shahrāshūb tellingly follows these accounts by saying, "If [these stories] are true, then it is like the flying and descending of the angels or the ascension (*isrāʾ*) of the prophet."[96] With this qualification, Ibn Shahrāshūb implies that there would be nothing strange about believing ʿAlī did, in fact, do these things, since God has enabled other beings to do so at times as well. By making such clarifications, though rarely so explicit, the biographers facilitate the canonization of a collective memory.

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[94] *Irshād,* II: 171 (Eng: 403).

IV.F. Warning against Heresy: the Brother of Imam al-ʿAskarī

One final social function accomplished by the accounts of betrayal is the issuance of warnings. With each retelling of deception or disloyalty, the audience is reminded of treacherous mistakes which should be avoided. Like the corpses of criminals which ruling powers hung in public spaces as a visual warning to the public, accounts of the betrayal of the imams serve as symbolic exhortations to remain faithful. For at times, the imams were betrayed by those who were closest to them. The culprits of these stories were neither those who denied the imamate nor those who deified the imams. Some emerged from the same womb as an infallible imam. A particularly memorable example of such intra-family betrayal is canonized in the accounts of Jaᶜfar b. ᶜAlī, the brother of Imam al-ᶜAskarī who is known in Shiᶜi sources as Jaᶜfar al-Kadhdhāb (the liar).[97]

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[95] *Manāqib,* III: 334-335.

[96] *Manāqib,* III: 335.

In most of the collective biographies, Jaᶜfar al-Kadhdhāb is first mentioned in the context of the biography of the sixth imam, Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq. Not only do they share first names, but their *laqabs* are parallel: al-Ṣādiq is "the truthful" whereas al-Kadhdhāb is "the liar." In a story that presages the betrayal and highlights the gap between the sixth imam and the traitor who later shared his name, several sources included a statement attributed to the Prophet which says, "When Jaᶜfar b. Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī b. al-Ḥusayn—my son—is born, call him al-Ṣādiq. As for his descendent, call him Jaᶜfar al-Kadhdhāb. Woe unto him who has insolence before God and hostility toward his brother, the possessor of the right of imam of his time."[98]

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[97] In addition to the sources cited below, see Modarressi's summary of the affair of Ja'far: *Crisis and Consolidation,* 70-86.

[98] *Dalāʾil,* 111. Cf *Iᶜlām,* 398; *Manāqib,* IV: 294.

This despised brother of Imam al-ᶜAskarī is remembered for his rejection of God's appointed heir, al-ᶜAskarī's son, and his attempt to claim the imamate for himself. The rift in the family appears to have preceded the death of al-ᶜAskarī, however, and it is likely that the brothers had competing claims to the imamate from an early age.[99] Both their father and al-ᶜAskarī are recorded giving explicit warnings about Jaᶜfar to their followers.[100] His character is condemned on numerous fronts; among other things he is accused of wine-bibbing.[101] The ultimate display of Jaᶜfar's betrayal comes in the form of a story of his going to the ᶜAbbāsid authorities and attempting to bribe them into recognizing his claim to the Shiᶜi imamate.[102] It is difficult to imagine a more discrediting act.

The followers of Jaᶜfar, Modarressi notes, constituted "a large number, possibly even the majority," of the proto-Twelver Shiᶜa immediately after the death of al-ᶜAskarī.[103] By the time of al-Mufīd and al-Ṭūsī, however, they had died out, a fact that influences the tenor of these writers' condemnation of Jaᶜfar. For these men and their contemporaries in the 10th century and beyond, serious consideration of Jaᶜfar's claims was no longer thinkable. The *Ithbāt* gives of Jaᶜfar's claims little attention, and subsequent works specify Jaᶜfar's vices rather than treat his claims.[104] In fact, as the genre develops, the condemnations of Jaᶜfar become increasingly elaborate and poignant. At times, his betrayal is even cited as the event that caused the twelfth imam to have to go into hiding.[105] In this vein, Jaᶜfar's treachery is framed as the catalyst that set in motion the epoch of occultation that continues to the present day. Given the fact that allegiance to Jaᶜfar was a moot point when collective biographies began to be written, the authors' condemnations of him cannot be read as warnings against accepting his claims. Instead, Jaᶜfar serves as a caution. His example is a warning against all types of betrayal of the imams.[106]

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[99] Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation,* 70-77.

[100] *Iᶜlām,* 367-368; al-Irbilī, *Kashf,* IV: 23, 112-113.

[101] *Al-Irshād,* II: 323 (Eng: 514); *Manāqib,* IV: 294.

[102] *al-Irshād,* II: 324, 336-337 (515, 523, respectively); *Iᶜlām,* 370-2; *Manāqib,* IV: 455; al-Irbilī, *Kashf,* IV: 65-68.

[103] Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation,* 81, 84.

IV.G. Summary of Observations

All of the infallibles are betrayed in their biographies. The betrayal narratives are not typically the longest or most emphasized aspect of their lives, but nonetheless these accounts play a critical role in heightening the memorability of the imams' lives. The pain and loss experienced by the imams is the central narratological feature which binds the individual biographies into a collective whole and transforms them into a meaningful genre of Shi'i storytelling and literature. Having examined how some of the betrayal accounts unfold, we can summarize a few of the main observations.

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[104] *Ithbāt,* 244.

[105] *al-Irshād,* II: 336-337 (Eng: 523); *Iᶜlām,* 373-4, 399, 437; *Kashf,* IV: 80, 113. See also Kohlberg, "Vision," 132.

[106] It should be noted that Jaᶜfar is not an entirely unique figure within the biographies. Each of the major splits within Shi'ism have to do with some type of intra-family—often brotherly—dispute. Some similarities can be found, for example, in the accounts about Muhammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (the brother of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn) (ex: *Ithbāt,* 166) or ᶜAlī b. Ismāᶜīl b. Jaᶜfar (the nephew of Imam al-Mūsá and grandson of al-Ṣādiq) (ex: *al-Irshād,* II: 238-239 (Eng: 452-453)). Other characters, however, are specifically exonerated of claims of disloyalty or betrayal. See for example the lengths al-Mufid goes to in order to redeem the memory of Zayd b. ᶜAlī (the supposed founder of Zaydī Shiᶜism): *al-Irshād,* II: 171-174 (Eng: 403-405); cf *Iᶜlām,* 270.

First, as we have seen with nearly all other facets of the imams' lives, the infallibles share in each other's sufferings. The differences between the imams become increasingly obscured as their stories are told in patterned and consistent ways. The betrayal that they all experience is a significant testament to this phenomenon. The symbols within these biographies are increasingly self-referential. The suffering of one imam can mirror, represent, or even fulfill the suffering of another imam. This phenomenon allows us to understand the significance of ʿĀshūrāʾ more fully. The importance and power attached to the memory of al-Ḥusayn are dependent upon and derived from the assumption that his martyrdom is *not* a unique event. Instead, it is the natural, even expected, outcome of the betrayal that befalls all of the imams.

Second**,** betrayal accounts are one of the key tools through which the authors assert and regulate normative conceptions of communal boundaries. Those who perpetrate crimes against the imams are symbols for all the "other," outsiders, which allows the authors to connect the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid caliphs who betrayed the imams with the traitors who betrayed the Prophet (and even the pre-Islamic prophets). This framing of the imams' lives also allows the audience to equate the *ghulāt*—

normally considered to be extreme Shiᶜa—with the Sunni, for both groups are disloyal to the imams and their divinely appointed roles.

In wrestling with group identity issues, the authors carry with them assumptions about the body, sexuality, and family relationships. Women who occupy the role of the imams' wives in the literature are often considered a threat to the imams, which stands in sharp contrast to those who are cast as daughters or mothers of future imams,. The "otherness" of the wives is not necessarily ameliorated by the bond of marriage. Family dynamics also include rivalries. This is particularly the case with brothers, whose betrayal of the imams is arguably the most nefarious given their participation in the family and blood relationship with the imams.

Finally, in considering these points together, we see specific criteria for truth emerging. The veracity of an account was judged, at least partly, on the extent to which its content conformed to what was already understood to be the case. Namely, once the nature of the imams and their enemies was reified, it became the standard by which future accounts were judged. Historical nuance and psychological complexities were less meaningful to the larger narrative and purpose of the literature. The continuity which a stable image of the imams facilitated (along with a consistent use of certain tropes and motifs) was simply more useful to the authors than ambiguities of historical process. But stable image of the imams (and their enemies) was a development within this genre, with its own effects. We see this more clearly in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Grief and Hope

“Will anyone visit (our graves) after we are killed?” asked [al-Husayn]. “Yes, my little son,” [the Prophet] told him, “a group (*ṭāʾifa*) of my community will gain my beneficence and favour through visiting (your graves). On the Day of Resurrection, I will bring them to the place so that I may take them by the arms and save them from its terrors and sorrows.”
–*Kitāb al-irshād*[1]

People will cast down their glances and then Fatemah, peace be upon her, will arrive seated on one of the highbred animals of Paradise, followed by 70 thousand angels. Then she will make a distinguished pause at one of the high stations on the Day of Judgment, dismount and take the blood soiled shirt of al-Husain b. Ali, peace be upon him, in her hands, saying, “O Allah! This shirt belongs to my son, and You know what was done to him.”
–*Amālī al-shaykh al-mufīd*[2]

“More subtle than the teardrop of the Shiᶜa”
-Arabic proverb[3]

The stories of the imams can be inspiring, absorbing, and entertaining, but they are short on surprising plot twists. The infallibles’ fates are foreshadowed and mourned long before their deaths occur. The only end that could possibly surprise readers would be an imam living to a ripe old age and dying peacefully in his sleep. Such an ending to an imam's life could not happen, however, for the symbolic system and narrative arc that hold the literature together renders a non-violent death for an imam impossible.

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[1] *Al-Irshād,* II: 131 (Eng: 377).

[2] The words here are attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq in al-Mufīd’s *Al-Amālī:* translated by Asgharali Jaffer in *Al Amaali* (Middlesex: World Federation, 1998), 132-133.

[3] This proverb comes from an anonymous *bayt* which reads, “More subtle than the teardrop of the Shīᶜa, that weeps for ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib” (*araqqu min damᶜati shīᶜa // tabkī ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib*): Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Maydānī, *Majmaʿ al-amthāl*, 2 vols., ed. Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tujārīyah al-Kubrá, 1959), II: 316, #1712. Ignaz Goldziher makes reference to this proverb in *Introduction to Islamic Theology,* translated by Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 179.

Through the logic emerging within this literature, the imams' martyrdom became a fixed and stable part of Shiᶜi history. As the structures and literary motifs of the collective biographies began to take shape, so too did the themes, symbols, and outlooks. Genres of literature and modes of narrative carry with them their own logic and assumptions.[4] One of the assumptions undergirding the biographies is that the office of the imamate is imbued with certain properties in which each of the imams shares. This clearly comes to play in how the deaths of the imams are remembered as I show here through the example of Imam al-Jawad.

The biographers of the imams did not intend to surprise, but to move. How the stories of the imams effect the community is chief among the concerns of the authors. With the example of the fourth imam, al-Sajjād, we can see just how thoroughly the notion of grief and mourning is embraced within this literature. All of the aspects of this literature already studied must be brought to bear on this emotional portrayal. The reasons for mourning are plentiful, as are the ramifications. But the audience is not left without hope. And if any mood stands out as dominant throughout the biographies, it is consolation. The subject of this chapter is how and why this result is cultivated.

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[4] David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 139-143.

V.A. The Necessity of Martyrdom: The Poisoning of Imam al-Jawād[5]

In November of the year 835 of the Common Era, the ninth imam, Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī al-Riḍā died. He was 25 years old at the time of his death. Known for his extreme generosity, he was and continues to be called by the honorific al-Jawād ("the generous"). Nearly all classical sources are in agreement on these points. The memory of Muḥammad al-Jawād becomes more variegated, however, when it comes to the matter of the cause of his death. Classical historians including Al-Ṭabarī, Khatīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Athīr, Ibn Khallikān, al-Dhahabī, al-Ṣafadī (in short, all major medieval Sunni scholars who mention al-Jawād's death) are silent on this issue.[6] In contrast, few Shiᶜi scholars fail to discuss the matter. The preeminent 10th century Shiᶜi traditionist Ibn Bābawayh, for example, in his *Risālat al-iᶜtiqādāt*, asserts that Imam al-

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[5] Much of the material in this section was presented in as a conference paper at AAR: "Killing the Imams: Classical Shiᶜi Narratives of the Twelve Imams and the Necessity of Martyrdom," *American Academy of Religion,* (Atlanta: October 30th, 2010).

[6] See Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: and Annotated Translation,* 40 vols., ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater (Albany: State University of New York Press, c1985-2007), v. 32: 184-185; Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat*, v. 4: 88-90, #1261; ʻAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʻAlī b. al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī tārīkh al-mulūk wa-al-umam,* 19 vols., ed. Muḥammad ʻAbd al-Qādir ʻAṭā, Muṣṭafá ʻAbd al-Qādir ʻAṭā, and Naʻīm Zarzūrmuntazam (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʻIlmīyah, 1992), v. 11: 62-3, #1257; ᶜIzz al-Dīn ᶜAlī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-ta'rīkh,* 11 vols., ed. ʻUmar ʻAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ᶜArabī, 1997), v. 6: 18; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʻyān,* 8 vols., ed. Iḥsān ʻAbbās (Beirut: Dar Assakafa, [1968?-1972?]), v. 4: 175, #561; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, v. 15: 385-6, #372; Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfī*, v. 4: 105-6, #1587.

Jawād was poisoned by the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (d. 227/842).[7] Shiʿi scholars were concerned not only that the ʿAbbāsid government had assassinated several Shiʿi imams, but also that Sunni authorities were enforcing silence on the issue, thereby erasing the event from public memory. A modern Shiʿi author of a biography of al-Jawād claims, "All books of history and tradition written by Sunnite scholars are silent about this fact [martyrdom of al-Jawād]. This is all due to the awesome influence of the Government and feeling of fear on the part of these writers and scholars and nothing else."[8] The deep anxiety associated with the notion of government-sanctioned erasure of public memory is reminiscent of the feeling captured by George Orwell in his book *1984.* In it, the protagonist reflects, "If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, *it never happened*—that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death."[9] If we speak of Shiʿism as a "community of memory,"[10] the biographies of the imams become important modes of contesting public memory. This is evidenced by Ibn Shahrāshūb's explanation of why he wrote his book, for he said it was his desire "to bring forth what they [the Sunnis] have suppressed."[11] The disparate social memories of the deaths of the imams bring us to questions of "who wants whom to remember what, and why?" [12] And why is a particular memory embraced or rejected?

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[7] Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Bābawayh al-Qummī, *Iʿtiqādat al-imāmiyah,* in *Muṣannafāt li-Shaykh al-Mufīd*, vol. 5 (Qum: al-Mu'tamir al-ʿĀlimī li-Alafīyah al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1413 [1992]), 98. Translation: *Shi'ite Creed,* 3rd edition, tr. Asaf A. A. Fyzee (Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 1999), 89.

[8] [Peer Mohamed Ebrahim Trust,] *Biography of Imam Taqi (A.S.),* (Karachi: Peer Mohamed Ebrahim Trust, 1975), 70: henceforth, Peer.

[9] George Orwell, *1984,* (London: Alcuin Press, 1949), 37. I was reminded of this quote by Jacob Climo and Maria Cattell (eds), *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives,* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 28.

[10] Bellah, et al, *Habits of the heart*, 153. This is briefly discussed in the introduction where there are references to more sources on the topic of social memory.

The different memories of al-Jawād's death were not always neatly split along Sunni-Shiᶜi lines. Despite Ibn Bābawayh's erudition and reputation, not all Shiᶜi scholars agreed with his account of the ninth imam's passing. Ibn Bābawayh's most important and influential student, our own al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, explicitly contradicts Ibn Bābawayh and claims that there is no reliable report that al-Jawād was poisoned or murdered.[13] Al-Mufīd, generally well regarded for his rationalist perspectives, cannot be read as reacting to *ghulāt* claims, for Ibn Bābawayh was himself arguing against the *ghulāt* in the passage where he mentions the martyrdom of al-Jawād. For Ibn Bābawayh, the assertion of al-Jawād's martyrdom was intended, at least in part, to exclude the possibility that some Shiᶜa might claim he was in hiding or occultation.[14]

While the story of al-Ḥusayn may be the apex of Shiᶜi martyrdom accounts, the deaths of other imams provide important insights into more distinctively Shiᶜi notions of martyrdom and historical meaning as they evolved. The martyrdom accounts of the other imams tend to have less historical attestation, but it is precisely this ambiguity that makes their deaths important spaces for discussions of communal boundaries, social memory, and sacred history.[15] Returning to the comparison between Ibn Bābawayh and al-Mufīd's accounts of the martyrdom of the imams, we find that Ibn Bābawayh provides stories for all of the imams (excluding the twelfth, of course), each time indicating the person responsible for the murders. In his *Kitāb al-irshād*, however, Al-Mufīd considered only five of the imams to have been killed: ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, Mūsá al-Kāẓim, and ʿAlī al-Riḍā. Despite the tremendous influence of al-Mufīd's *Kitāb al-irshād* on the genre of biographies of the imams, most medieval writers ignored al-Mufīd's views on this issue. And by the Safavid and early modern periods, scarcely a reference can be found which acknowledges the possibility that any of the first eleven imams may not have been murdered. The notion that all of the eleven deceased imams were killed evolves into an unquestioned assumption that in turn becomes a significant aspect of Shiʿi constructions of sacred history. To illustrate this progression I further explore accounts of al-Jawād, whose story makes evident the process of canonization.

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[11] *Manāqib,* v. 1, 18-19. See also, v. 1, 34-35.

[12] Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History," 1389-1393.

[13] *Al-Irshād,* II: 295 (Eng: 495).

[14] See Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā' Ashariyya," 521-34.

In the *Ithbāt* account, the ʻAbbāsid caliph al-Muʿtaṣim plots to kill the imam by way of his niece, Umm al-Faḍl, who was married al-Jawād:

> Al-Muʿtaṣim and Jaʻfar b. al-Ma'mūn continued to plot and plan a trick to kill him [al-Jawād]. So Jaʻfar said to his sister, Umm al-Faḍl—she was his full sister—that he was aware of her disinclination toward him [al-Jawād] and her jealousy over his preference for the mother of Abū al-Ḥasan,[16] his son, and her intense love for him since she had been

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[15] Martyrdom accounts can be a useful place to explore religious boundaries; see Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God*.

[16] The presumption about wives and mothers discussed in previous chapters is seen here again.

> blessed with a son by him. She responded to her brother, Ja'far, and they made poison in something made from Rāziqī grapes.[17]

By provoking her to jealousy over the favoritism al-Jawād showed to the mother of his son, al-Muʿtaṣim and Ja'far are able to convince Umm al-Faḍl to feed the imam poisoned grapes. The account proceeds to describe the enactment of divine justice on Umm al-Faḍl and her brother. Despite apparent regret over her involvement, Umm al-Faḍl is cursed with an affliction, which the author calls as *nāsūrā*—probably a type of ulcer or tumor—and which the author adds was said to have appeared in her genitalia (*fī farjihā*).

> He [al-Jawād] was delighted by the Rāziqī grapes, but when he ate from them she began to cry. He said to her, "Why are you crying? Truly God will strike you with an unyielding poverty and an affliction without protection." She was then afflicted with a condition in the most hidden parts of her body, which became a *nāsūrā.* It constantly afflicted her such that she spent all her money and possessions on the illness until she became dependant on the support of people. It is said (*yurwa*) that the *nāsūrā* was in her genitalia.[18]

Ja'far the co-conspirator suffers no such harm to his *farj*; instead he falls into a well while in a drunken stupor and dies.[19] The siblings' fates illustrate another recurring theme in the biographies: the worst of the evildoers are justly punished. Sometimes those punishments occur immediately,[20] and at others it is foretold.[21] The emphasis on the imams’ betrayers coming to bad ends provides a glimmer of hope for audience, who can take comfort in small displays of justice in the wake of greater injustice.

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[17] *Ithbāt,* 227.

[18] *Ithbāt,* 227.

[19] *Ithbāt*, 227.

[20] Examples include the one given here of Jaʿfar and Umm al-Faḍl (references below), and other examples: al-Ṭabrisī clarifies that a few people who injured the Prophet did not die naturally, one of them being

The narrative preserved in *Dalā’il al-imāma* is similar to the one above. As in the *Ithbāt,* Umm al-Faḍl’s jealousy is ascribed to her childlessness, and the murder weapon is said to be poisoned grapes.[22] Moreover, the author of *Dalāʾil* concurs that the imam immediately cursed Umm al-Faḍl with an affliction “in her most hidden parts” from which she died. However, there is also an intriguing alternate account in *Dalāʾil*:

> [Others] have said that she poisoned him using a handkerchief (*mandīl*)[23] by rubbing it on him during sexual intercourse. And when he sensed it, he said to her, “God will test you with a disease without cure.” Then a gangrenous sore (*akila*) appeared in her genitalia. She was shown to doctors and they looked at her and prescribed

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impaled by a ram in his sleep (99, Eng: 129; see previous chapter for the role of animals); an informant for the caliph is killed during Imam al-Kāẓim’s life (*al-Irshad,* II: 225-227 (Eng: 444-445)); al-Kāẓim’s nephew who betrays him to the caliph ends up dying unceremoniously while defecating (*al-Irshād,* II: 238-239 (Eng: 452-453)); al-Hādī’s brother, who is tricked by the caliph, is made into a mockery during his life (*al-Irshād,* II: 307-308 (End: 502-5023)).

[21] Examples of explicitly promised future punishment include: when al-Ḥusayn asked al-Ḥasan, after the latter was poisoned, if he wanted al-Ḥusayn to avenge his death, al-Ḥasan says he will oppose his murderer before God instead (*al-Irshād,* II: 16-18 (Eng: 287-288)); Imam al-Hādī assured one of his followers that his murderer will soon die (al-Irbilī, *Kashf,* IV: 36-37 (taken from *Kharā’ij*)). We’ve already seen in the last chapter how the enemies of the imams are emasculated and dehumanized. Here, we can also add that the enemies are regularly portrayed as effectively judged as criminal and are victim to—or soon awaiting—the judgment of God for their actions. Cf. Barton, “Savage Miracles,” especially 51-52. This guarantee of future justice is discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

[22] *Dalā’il,* 204.

[23] Franz Rosenthal makes some insightful notes about the use of this term in classical Arabic literature: *Four Essays on Art and Literature in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 84.

> medicines for her, but they were without any benefit. She died from her condition.[24]

This alternate story heightens the sense of poetic justice, for the imam's wife kills her husband in a sexual context, presumably by rubbing a poisoned cloth on his penis, after which the imam curses her with a deadly affliction on her own gentalia. Neither the *Ithbāt* nor *Dalā'il* cites a source or provides an *isnād*, though both share in common the assertion that the imam's childless wife, daughter of the 'Abāssid caliph al-Ma'mūn, was the perpetrator. As discussed in the previous chapter, this motif of feminine trickery and deceit occurs regularly in literature from this period and is prevalent in biographies of the imams (at least three of the imams are commonly said to have been killed by their wives).

It was in response to these accounts which were circulating, [25] that al-Mufīd made clear that he felt the rumors about al-Jawād being poisoned were unsubstantiated and unreliable.[26] Al-Ṭabrisī, who generally follows al-Mufīd's work closely, expresses his reluctance to commit either way on the matter, saying simply, "it has been said (*qīla*) that he died by poisoning."[27] But as collective biographies solidified into an identifiable genre and proliferated in the 12th and 13th centuries, the thematic range of these works became more closed and their categorical logic more consistent. Although later works contain an occasional reference to al-Mufīd's position on al-Jawād's death, the discursive weight of generic logic made his position increasingly unthinkable.[28] In this

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[24] This quote is taken from the 1992 edition of *Dalāʾil* (395), which makes a little bit more sense than the edition normally used in this study—this is a superior edition, but I have had only limited access to it and have therefore relied mainly on the 1988 edition. The 1988 edition says that after the imam felt the infection, "he prayed a certain prayer and it worked. She showed it to doctors but they had no medicine for it, until she died": *Dalā'il,* 204.

[25] We can add to these Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, who wrote just a few decades after al-Mufīd, includes a detailed account pertaining to the ninth imam in his short book *ʿUyūn al-muʿjizāt*, which focuses on the miracles of the imams. In his account, Umm al-Faḍl is said to have become enraged when she found a new wife of the imam in the house. She complains to her father, al-Ma'mūn, who goes to al-Jawād's house in a drunken stupor and slays him with his sword. When the Caliph sobers up he is horrified to hear of his own actions. Dismayed and regretful, the Caliph sends someone to find out about the status of the young man only to learn that al-Jawād is uninjured: 323-329. Though the story differs from the other accounts in that God miraculously preserves al-Jawād's life, it buttresses the general understanding of Umm al-Faḍl's deep jealousy toward al-Jawād and the deadly peril in which it puts the imam. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb goes on to confirm that al-Muʿtaṣim indeed plotted to kill the imam. The account is almost identical to that in the Ithbāt (even the phrasing is much the same), with the exception that it contains

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no mention of Ja'far b. al-Ma'mūn. As in the other stories, the caliph manipulates Umm al-Faḍl's jealousy to induce her to poison al-Jawād, and once again she is cursed with a tumor (nāsūr) in her sexual organs (though it does not specify whether she died from the affliction): 331-332. The martyrdom of ninth imam is further substantiated in this work by another miracle account *ʿUyūn al-muʿjizāt* which has the eighth imam, ʿAlī al-Riḍá, predicting the martyrdom of the ninth imam at his son's birth, saying, "He will be killed in rage and the company of heaven will weep for him": 309-310.

[26] *Al-Irshād,* I: 295 (Eng: 495).

[27] *Iʿlām,* 351.

[28] As mentioned in the beginning, medieval Sunni writers, including Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, were completely silent on the issue, though Umm al-Faḍl was typically mentioned as being with al-Jawād in Baghdad when he died: *Tadhkirat al-khawāṣ* (Qum: Manshūrāt Dhuwī al-Qurbī, 1427*]),* 446-447. See also: al-Ṭabarī, *History*, v. 32: 184-5; Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, v. 4: 88-90, #1261; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, v. 11: 62-3, #1257; Ibn Athīr, *Kāmil*, v. 6: 18; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafāyat*, v. 4: 175, #561; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh*, v. 15: 385-6, #372; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī*, v. 4: 105-6, #1587. And even in the Shiʿi literature on the imams in the 12th to 15th centuries, some doubt can occasionally be seen regarding the martyrdom of Imam al-Jawād. For example, al-Ṭabrīsī*,* in his *I'lām*, used the less-committal passive voice, saying "it has been said that he died by poisoning": 351. And later al-Irbilī, in his *Kashf al-ghummah* prefaced his section with al-Mufīd's comments on the matter—one of the very few times al-Mufīd is mentioned regarding this topic by the Shiʿa—and al-Irbilī leaves out most of the other death accounts: III: 520-530. This more skeptical approach to the question, however, was clearly in the minority when it comes to the literature on the lives of the imams. As mentioned, almost none of the Shiʿi authors quote al-Mufīd's position on the matter, despite the fact that they all rely on his accounts extensively otherwise. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Fattāl in *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn* refrained from giving any details, but he does unequivocally

matter, Ibn Shahrāshūb's 12th century work would become far more representative of the literature. His *Manāqib* was the largest work of this genre at the time of its writing, and as I have noted, Ibn Shahrāshūb culled reports on the lives of the imams from an array of Sunni and Shiʿi scholars' works. This method of using wide-ranging source material but organizing it according to Shiʿi sensibilities and devotional perspectives was repeated many times over by writers in subsequent centuries.

It should be noted that despite Ibn Shahrāshūb's use of many different source materials, he includes no reports that contradict the notion that al-Jawād was murdered. Ibn Shahrāshūb clearly believed the imam was poisoned, though he does not commit himself to one account of how that occurred. In fact, he presents two versions of the story. In the first, the caliph himself poisons the imam:

> Once al-Muʿtaṣim was recognized [as caliph] he began to evaluate his circumstances. So he wrote to ʻAbd al-Malak al-Zayyāt to send al-Ṭaqī [Imām al-Jawād] and Umm al-Faḍl to him. So al-Zayyāt's son, ʿAlī b. Yaqtin, was sent to him. He [al-Jawād] prepared and left for Baghdad. Then he [al-Muʿtaṣim] honored and praised him [al-Jawād] and sent Ashnās with gifts for him and Umm al-Faḍl. Then he sent him a citrus drink with his seal by way of Ashnās, and he said, "Have Amīr al-Mu'minīn [al-Jawād] taste it before Aḥmad b. Abī Dawād and Saʻd b. al-Khaṣīb and the rest of them." And he ordered him to mix it with ice water; and he [Ashnās] prepared it in this way. But he [al-Jawād] said, "I will drink it in the evening." He [al-Muʿtaṣim] replied, "But it is

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state that the imam was poisoned while in Baghdād: 267. Even the 15th century Māliki scholar, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, in his *Fusūl al-muhimmah,* concedes that it is a possibility that he was poisoned—this is the only medieval Sunnī writer I've found to make such a concession: II: 1057-1058.

> good cold, and by then the ice will have melted." He persisted in this way. So he drank it, with full knowledge of their actions.[29]

In the second account, Umm al-Faḍl commits the act during sexual intercourse using a handkerchief (*mandīl*), nearly identical to the account in *Dalāʾil* (including the gangrenous sore from which she dies).[30]

This framing of the question around *how* the imam was poisoned and not *whether* he was poisoned is the model followed by most subsequent scholars writing this literature and is nearly universal in contemporary literature of this genre. The reinforcement of specific assumptions about the imams through the repetition of these accounts can be seen in works in later centuries, such as Majlisī's impressive contribution to the genre, *Jalā' al-ʿuyūn: tārīkh-i chahārdah maʿṣūm.* In this Persian work, Majlisī makes no mention that al-Mufīd, or any other scholar, doubted that Imam al-Jawād was martyred. Instead, like Ibn Shahrāshūb and many others, he simply presents the different versions of his martyrdom. While Majlisī accumulates more stories of his death than previous scholars, his inclination to assume the involvement of Umm al-Faḍl seems relatively clear.[31]

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[29] *Manāqib,* IV: 416. This account may be understood as a miracle account—that the imam was not killed, though being poisoned

[30] *Manāqib,* IV: 423. Another fascinating line that occurs here and several other sources has Umm al-Faḍl complaining to her father, al-Maʾmūn that the imam has taken a concubine. The caliph responds to her jealous complaint saying, "I did not marry you to Abū Jaʿfar [al-Jawād] to prohibit for him what is permissible (*ḥilāl^{an}*)": IV: 414.

[31] Majlisī, *Jalā' al-ʿuyūn*, 959-972.

Even a cursory look at modern Shiᶜi biographies of the imams reveals the full force of the literary tradition shaped by scholars from Ibn Jarīr to Majlisī. Shaykh ʻAbbās Qummī, famous for compiling the popular collection of devotional prayers knowns as *Mafātīḥ al-jinān*, also wrote a work on the lives of the imams titled *Muntahá al-āmāl*. In it he states that debate exists concerning *how* Imam al-Jawād was poisoned by Muᶜtaṣim, but he never questions whether the imam was poisoned or whether the caliph had anything to do with it.[32] Similarly ʻAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in his popular book *Shīᶜa dar Islām*, states matter-of-factly that Muᶜtaṣim used Umm al-Faḍl to poison the imam and even provides commentary on the caliph's motives.[33] ᶜAlī Dukhayyil, in his *A'immatunā*, shows similar confidence in the fact that al-Jawād was poisoned,[34] as does Muḥammad Muḥammadi Ishtihārdi in his *Maṣā'ib āl Muḥammad*.[35] Not only have I been unable to find any notable modern or contemporary Shiᶜi biography of Imam al-Jawād that shows any doubt about him being poisoned, I have yet to find any that mention that there ever *was* any doubt.[36] The act of remembering is simultaneously an act of forgetting.

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[32] Qummī, *Muntahá al-āmāl,* II: 403-6.

[33] Tabatabai, *Shiʻa,* 207.

[34] Dukhayyil, *A'immatunā,* II: 162.

[35] Muḥammad Muḥammadī Ishtihārdī, *Maṣā'ib Āl Muḥammad: fī bayān ḥayāt wa-al-maṣā'ib al-mu'limah lil-maʻṣūmīn al-arbaʻat ʻashar wa-shuhadā' wa-sabāyā Karbalā' maʻa marāthīhim* (Beirut: Dār al-Kātib al-ᶜArabī, 2002), 137-145.

[36] For further examples, see: Mahdī Pīshvā'ī, *Sīrah-'i pīshvāyān : nigarishī bar zindagānī-i ijtimāʻī, siyāsī va farhangī-i imāmān-i maʻṣūm ʻalayhum al-salām,* (Qum: Mu'assasah-i Imām Ṣādiq, 1388 [2009]), 563-4; [World Organization for Islamic Sciences,] *A Brief History of the Fourteen Infallibles,* (Tehran: World Organization for

The canonizing of a specific historical memory within this genre of Shiʿi literature is not limited to the martyrdom of Imam al-Jawād. The example I have discussed here represents a consistent pattern which can be followed in relationship to the martyrdoms of all eleven deceased imams. As mentioned previously, the martyrdoms of a few of the imams, most notably ʿAlī and al-Ḥusayn, are well established in nearly all relevant historical sources, even if there are differences regarding the details. Al-Mufīd believed five of the imams to have been martyred, the accounts of which he provided in his *Kitāb al-irshād*. The martyrdoms of the other six imams, however, were originally ambiguous and there was some debate about them, like that that of al-Jawād. But the occurrence of their martyrdoms eventually became assumed within this literature. By the Safavid period when Majlisī wrote, there seems to have been no space left for the possibility that an imam might not have been a martyr. It simply ceased to be a meaningful consideration.[37]

The varying accounts of al-Jawād's death and those of the other imams are fascinating, and a study of the origins of various components of the martyrdom narratives would likely prove interesting. But *isnad* analysis and other similar inquiries are unlikely to reveal much about the emergence of consensus regarding the imams'

Islamic Sciences, 1984), 158; Mahdī Khalīl Jaʿfar, *al-Mawsūʿah al-kubrá li- Ahl al-Bayt,* 16 vols. (Beirut: Markaz al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ al-Thaqāfī, 2009), v. 11: 154-160.

[37] Cooperson makes some very similar observations in his discussion of biographies on Imam al-Riḍá: *Classical Arabic Biography,* 98-104. He notes, "If the imams were not a threat, the caliphs would not have to murder them": 99. By extension, we might add here, if the caliphs did not try to murder the imams, it would call into question the legitimacy of their status as imam.

martyrdom in this literature. Moreover, it may prove a distraction from the broader observation that uncertainty surrounding al-Jawād's death among a few influential scholars of the 10th and 11th centuries gradually gave way to a solidification of historical consciousness. Over subsequent centuries, the stories become increasingly fixed, though occasionally enriched with speculative detail. Despite the fact that nearly all of the medieval scholars whose works I have cited here were also scholars of the hadith sciences, the decisions made in the compiling and composing of their works go beyond disputes over the reliability of transmitters.[38] How and why these particular narratives achieved a semi-canonized status is what concerns me.

Furthermore, the question of martyrdom is not merely an issue of theology. Though some Shiᶜi scholars include the martyrdom of the first eleven imams in lists of articles of the faith, such statements were typically directed against early Shiᶜi groups who were inclined to think that an imam, such as Mūsá al-Kāẓim or ᶜAlī al-Riḍá, had not died but was alive in a state of occultation.[39] Ibn Bābawayh's insistence that the imam's were martyred was rooted in this context. In addition, the parameters of what constituted a martyr's death were quite flexible, David Cook has shown.[40] Death by the plague or natural catastrophe could be construed as a martyr's death, as could dying in a state of purity.[41] The imams did not have to be betrayed and killed to fulfill the theological category of martyrdom. The issue, then, is not that the imams were technically martyrs, but that they were betrayed and murdered.

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[38] Even early Sunni traditionists were influenced by a wider range of concerns when determining the "effective truth" of hadith reports: Jonathan A. C. Brown, "Did the Prophet Say It or Not? The Literal, Hitorical, and Effective Truth of *Hadiths* in Early Sunnism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, 2 (2009), 280.

[39] See M. Ali Buyukkara, "The Schism in the Party of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and the Emergence of the Wāqifa," *Arabica* 47, no. 1 (2000): 78-99. Such is the context of Ibn Bābwayh's insistence that the imāms were martyred.

[40] David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 31-36.

The twelve imams were different people with different lives in different times. Some, like Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq, distinguished themselves for their scholarly achievements. ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, on the other hand, is often used as the best example of the leadership properties of the imamate. ᶜAlī al-Riḍá is alone in his tragic brush with the possibility of reclaiming leadership over the larger Muslim community. These individualizing elements come through in the biographies. But the placing of the imams' life stories together in one work is accompanied by an assimilation of qualities. The erudition of the fourth and fifth imams becomes a proof for what the type of intellectual capacities each imam must have had. The leadership skills displayed by ᶜAlī are assumed in the interactions of other imams with their followers. Though some individuality remains, an associative logic functions in each author's construction of a history of the imams that melds the figures together. Participation in the office of the imamate means participation in all of the qualities associated with it.[42]

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[41] Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nuᶜmanī al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī,* (Najaf: al-Maṭbaʻat al-Haydariyah, 1962), 46. Translation: *Al Amaali,* 78.

[42] As Peter Burke notes in relation to a different context: "what happens in the case of these myths is that differences between past and present are elided, and unintended consequences are turned into conscious aims, as if the main purpose of these past heroes had been to bring about the present—our present": "History as Social Memory," in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, edited by Thomas Butler, 97-113 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 110.

This assimilation of qualities is also at work in portrayals of the imams' enemies. That a given adversary would plot and kill an imam functions as evidence that the same could—and would—happen again. A class of "enemy" exists across time, treating all the imams in the same fashion. This assumption, often left implicit in classical sources, is explicitly expressed in modern sources. Returning to the work of a contemporary writer, we read,

> ...whatever device out of these various methods was acted upon under instructions of Motassim should not cause any surprise. Those people who have read the life-accounts of these sacred personalities [i.e.- the fourteen infallibles] fully know that various kinds of devices were used for killing or murdering these sublime personalities. The assassins adopted whatever method was considered by them to be suitable keeping in view the existing state of affairs at that time. The various means adopted by Haroon [al-Rashid] to kill the solitary personality of Imam Musa Kazim (A. S.) are well-known to the world. *If any intelligent and wise person carefully observes the variety of methods adopted by him he can easily understand that it is not very much surprising if Motassim also adopted both these means for the assassination and martyrdom of Imam Mohammad Taqi (A. S.) [al-Jawād].*[43] [Emphasis mine]

Here the author asserts that it is reasonable to assume that Imam al-Jawād was poisoned based on the fate of a previous imam. Not only do the imams share the same office, but the Sunni rulers function as a monolithic enemy with monolithic intentions. The cultivation of this mentality in the collective biographies promotes a particular logic and the organization of narratives around shared and reinforced viewpoints. In this way, the genre has cultivated a particular social memory and a self-sustaining version of sacred history. With each account of the martyrdom of each imam, the Shiʿa have contested the official memory of the Sunni rulers, challenged their authority, and asserted their own interpretation of God's plan for humanity. In so doing, a logic is established which not only renders the natural death of an imam unthinkable, but also makes the killing of the imams inevitable.

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[43] Peer, *Biography of Imam Taqi (A. S.),* 69-70.

V.B. Emotional Responses: The Tears of Imam al-Sajjād

The only son of al-Ḥusayn said to have survived the slaughter at Karbalāʾ was ʿAlī (the younger),[44] who stayed in the tents with the women that day because he was too sick to go out to battle. The Twelver Shiʿa believe that the imamate passed on to him, though he had only a small following for the remainder of his life, most of which was spent quietly in Medina.[45] It is no surprise that the fourth imam's grief over his father's death inspired the imaginations of Shiʿi writers for centuries to come. Imam al-Sajjād, then, is an ideal catalyst for remembering the suffering of al-Ḥusayn. He is also an excellent example, though not entirely unique, of the emotions performed by the imams within the biographies.

Ibn Shahrāshūb records a statement that al-Sajjād wept for twenty years after ʿĀshūrāʾ.[46] The honorific used here, *al-sajjād*, refers to the time al-Ḥusayn's son spent in prayerful prostration, and this account and many others illustrate how the memory of the fourth imam is entwined with images of his mourning. Al-Sajjād is said to have prayed so much that his body became marked and contorted from long hours of prostration.[47] In one tradition, the fifth imam (al-Bāqir) describes seeing his father's body discolored, his face bruised and mashed, and his legs swollen from the length of his prayers. The sight is said to have caused al-Bāqir to weep uncontrollably.[48]

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[44] He had an older brother also named ʿAlī who died at Karbalāʾ.

[45] Jafri, *Origins and Early Development,* 235-244.

[46] *Manāqib,* IV: 179-180.

These accounts and many others like them illustrate a salient point: the imams display high levels of grief and mourning in the biographies. In her book entitled *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed provides profound insight into the way words, texts, and discourses evoke specific emotions. Emotions, argues Ahmed, have a "sticky" quality that enables them to be attached to language.[49] Communication is thus irrevocably connected to emotion. The former not only expresses, but is a catalyst for the controlled reproduction of the latter.[50] Central to Ahmed's arguments is her emphasis on understanding the "outside in" aspect of emotion.[51] Rather than understanding emotions as something generated internally in the individual and expressed in various manners, she views emotion as social and cultural practices which communities regulate through discursive norms.

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[47] *Al-Irshād,* II: 140-143 (Eng: 382-384).

[48] *Al-Irshād,* II: 142 (Eng: 383).

[49] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 89-95.

[50] Luisa Passerini writes, "if cultural history is, as I believe it to be, a history of forms of subjectivity, we cannot understand subjectivity unless we see emotions as constituents of it. Memory, which is a form of subjectivity, would not exist without its emotional undertones and components, and the same applies to identity, of course": "Connecting Emotions: Contributions from Cultural History," *Historein* 8, (2008), 121.

[51] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 9. The "outside in" approach is what Herman calls the "constructionist approach" to emotion; the alternate view, what Ahmed calls the "inside out" is referred to as the "naturalist" approach by Herman: "Cognition, Emotion, and Consciousness," 254-255.

Ahmed also observes that emotion and rationality are connected and interdependent, when distinguishable at all. Intelligence is never devoid of emotion, and part of the goal of even the most rationalist or tradition-oriented discourses is to shape "emotional intelligence."[52] The ostensible elimination of emotion in some forms of communication is actually an emotional response itself. We should therefore avoid the temptation to describe the biographies of the imams as "emotional," which implicitly contrasts them with other literatures (be them legal, hadith, or historical) which are ostensibly unemotional. Instead, the biographies are simply "affected" differently than other genres. The biographies have their own emotional norms, and "worlds materialize" and communal boundaries stabilize through the repetition of these norms.[53]

One unique aspect of the collective biographies is the self-reflection the imams evince as a class: they are often depicted thinking about the lives of the other imams. This not only lends a diachronic aspect to the content—allowing later imams to consider the lives of earlier imams—but also emphasizes the thaumaturgical nature of the infallibles, which allows the prophet, Fāṭima, and early imams to perceive the fate of their successors.[54] One type of emotional display by the imams that stands out is their mourning, specifically in the form of weeping. As mentioned above, Imam al-Sajjād's mourning over the death of his family at Karbalāʾ takes on monumental proportions. He wept for the rest of his life and was even unable to eat a meal without crying.[55] He referred to himself as "the son of the one for whom the angels of heaven weep."[56] Each of the works in this study mentions his tears, and most of the prayers in the collection attributed to him have an undeniably somber tone.[57]

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[52] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 3-4.

[53] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 12.

[54] This is discussed in chapters three and four.

Frequent portrayals of the fourth imam weeping reflect and reinforce the complex and nuanced emotional system of the biographies. It should be noted that al-Sajjād's tears were not solely on account of his father and the tragedy on ʿĀshūrā. The imam cries for numerous other reasons as well.[58] Typically these involve the fate of the entire family, the *ahl al-bayt.*[59] This supports a point made in the previous chapter, namely, that the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn is not the central cosmic event of Shiʻism.[60] Karbalāʾ is an event that reveals a larger reality beyond itself that inflicts suffering on the entire *ahl al-bayt*. It is that overarching unjust order that is the root of sorrow; ʿĀshūrā is simply one of its most powerful manifestations.

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[55] *Manāqib*, IV: 179-180.

[56] *Manāqib*, IV: 182.

[57] See *Psalms of Islam,* trans. W. Chittick (Qum: Ansariyan, 2000).

[58] See, for example, his tears while re-covering the Kaʿba, presumably related to its sacredness: *Manāqib*, IV: 152.

[59] Various examples: *Ithbāt,* 175; *al-Irshād,* II: 142-143 (Eng: 383); *Iʿlām,* 398-399; *Manāqib,* IV: 158, 163-164.

[60] This is where I feel Ayoub's otherwise excellent work, *Redemptive Suffering,* misleads. He directs the mourning of Imam al-Sajjād, and nearly the entire focus on sorrow, toward the tragedy of al-Ḥusayn.

All the infallibles weep. Crying appears in the biographies with compelling frequency. At nearly every turn, one of the imams reacts in tears, an action that constantly reinforces the affective logic of the biographies. The Prophet weeps many times, particularly over the fate of ʿAlī and Fāṭima.[61] Fāṭima in turn sobs over her father's death, among other reasons.[62] ʿAlī's tears are both retrospective (in relationship to Muḥammad)[63] and prospective (he weeps over his son's future fate).[64] Al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn weep for their father[65] and for their own fates.[66] In short, all the imams from ʿAlī to al-ʿAskarī perform such emotional displays.[67] Their crying is often portrayed as loud and intense, a point to which I return below, and which is indicated most often with language like "he wept violently" (*baká bukā*$^{\text{ʾan}}$ *shadīd*$^{\text{an}}$).[68]

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[61] See *al-Irshād,* II: 129-131 (Eng: 375-376); *Dalāʾl,* 27, 231-232; *Iʿlām,* 24 (Eng: 14), 100-101 (Eng: 131-132), 125 (Eng: 175), 199, 225; *Manāqib,* I: 89, 151, 279, , 290, II: 87, 91, 139, III: 311, 390, IV: 67, 78, 88-89, 91-92,

[62] See *Dalāʾil,* 27; *Iʿlām,* 97 (Eng: 128), 150 (Eng: 214); *Manāqib,* III: 365, 385, 411, IV: 71.

[63] See al-Irshād, I: 116 (Eng: 78), I: 165 (Eng: 115); *Iʿlām,* 115, 204; *Manāqib,* II: 139; III: 167, 356.

[64] See *al-Irshād,* I: 332 (Eng: 251); *Manāqib,* II: 305.

[65] See *al-Irshād,* II: 8 (Eng: 281); *Iʿlām,* 216; *Manāqib,* IV: 76-77.

[66] See *Iʿlām,* 236; *Manāqib*, IV: 18, 93, 95, 117. See also Sindawi, "The Image of Husayn," 92-93.

[67] For al-Sajjād, see *Ithbāt,* 175; *al-Irshād,* II: 142 (Eng: 383-384); *Iʿlām,* 398-399, *Manāqib,* IV: 152, 158, 163-164, 179-180, 182. For al-Bāqir, *al-Irshād,* II: 142 (383); *Manāqib,* 211. For al-Ṣādiq, *Dalāʾil,* 102, 133; *Manāqib,* IV: 94, 257, 261. For al-Kāẓim, *al-Irshād,* II: 231 (Eng: 448); *Iʿlām,* 307; *Manāqib,* IV: 343, 348-349. For al-Riḍá, *Iʿlām,* 328, 330, 342-343; *Manāqib,* IV: 366-367. For al-Jawād, *al-Irshād,* II: 298 (497); *Iʿlām,* 352; *Manāqib,* IV: 366-367. For al-Hādī, *Ithbāt, 229; Dalāʾil,* 215; *Manāqib,* IV: 440. For al-ʿAskarī, *al-Irshād,* II: 318 (510); *Iʿlām,* 364; *Manāqib,* IV: 456. There are also instances of pre-Islamic figures crying: *Manāqib,* I: 229, 279, IV: 67, 275, 384. See also, Sindawi, "Noah and Noah's Ark," 33.

[68] Some examples of this phrase can be found in *Manāqib*, I: 290 (speaking of the Prophet); *Manāqib* IV: 158 and 399 (of Imam al-Sajjād); *Iʿlām*, 330 (of Imam al-Rida); *I'lām*, 423 (of Imam al-Jawād); *Dalāʾil*, 215 and *Ithbāt,* 229 (of Imam al-Hādī). Cf- Fāṭima screaming and throwing dirt (*Iʿlām*, 150 (Eng: 214)); al-Bāqir crying uncontrollably (*al-Irshād*, II: 142 (Eng: 383); al-Ṣādiq's eyes being flooded with tears (*Manāqib* IV:

The imams' weeping is invitational, as evidenced by many the many stories of people near the imams crying.[69] Several examples of this stand out. For example, the people around the prophet's deathbed are said to have lamented and wept loudly.[70] Zaynab lamented and tore her clothes,[71] and Muslim b. ʿAqīl cried near the end of his life, saying "I would not weep for myself...but I am weeping for my family who are coming to me. I am weeping for al-Husayn and the family of al-Husayn."[72] These and many other examples project a strong sense of the appropriateness of crying over the fate of the imams and the Prophet's family.[73] Explicit exhortations to weep and mourn for the imams are also present, as when al-Ḥusayn says, "I am dead in tears; believers do not remember me except in tears."[74] An array of poetic pieces exhorting people to tears can be found as well, particularly in the *Manāqib*.[75]

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94); al-Kāẓim soaking his beard with tears (*al-Irshād*, 448; *Iʿlām*, 307; *Manāqib*, IV: 343, 348-349); and al-Hādī wailing while crying (*Dalāʾil*, 215; *Ithbāt*, 229).

[69] For instances where this process is enacted, i.e.- the weeping of an imam causes people around them to cry as well: see *al-Irshād*, II: 8 (281); *Iʿlām*, 216; *Manāqib* IV: 67, 163-164, 257.

[70] *Al-Irshād,* I: 184 (Eng: 130); *Iʿlām,* 147 (Eng: 210).

[71] *Al-Irshād,* II: 93 (Eng: 348); *Iʿlām,* 244.

[72] *Al-Irshād*, II: 59 (Eng: 321).

[73] Some examples include, *al-Irshād,* I: 17 (Eng: 10), I: 184 (Eng: 130), I: 319-320 (Eng: 241-242), II: 113-116 (Eng: 364-365), II: 129-131 (Eng: 376); *Dalāʾil,* 84, 139-140, 176-177, 200-201, 231, 260; *Iʿlām,* 147 (Eng: 210), 169, 411; *Manāqib,* I: 292, II: 93, III: 356, IV: 23, 71, 73, 147, 163-164, 180, 211, 213, 335, 472-473.

[74] *Manāqib*, IV*:* 95.

[75] Some interesting examples include *Manāqib*, I: 299-300, II: 245-246, III: 161, 359-360, IV: 71, 126, 129, 133, 300. These are usually snippets taken from *rithā'* poems, see below.

The ritual act of mourning and its literary representation in Arabic have specific dynamics which come into play here. Funerary practices (*al-janāza*) in early Muslim communities were the subject of numerous debates over proper ritual.[76] Public displays of mourning, such as crying (*bukāʾ*) and wailing (*niyāha*), were often sources of contention. Proto-Sunni traditionists collected a number of hadith which denounce such activities. Lamenting loudly and visibly appears to have been associated with pre-Islamic (*jāhilī)* paganism. At least partly for this reason, there was a general desire to differentiate Islam through distinct mourning rituals. Numerous influential Sunni pietists promoted austerity and patient restraint as the proper behavioral mood at funerals, though silent tears were permitted.[77]

Gendered associations with crying and wailing were key aspects of the debate over proper mourning practices. Mourning the dead was a social activity "dominated by women."[78] For added funerary affect, one could hire women to wail for the deceased, a professional known as a *nāʾiha.* For some, the public presence of crying women, hired or voluntary, was an unacceptable disruption of public order, a manifestation of *fitna.* In a very real sense, these activities were a gender transgression, i.e. - a place where the normative rules of gender were not consistently applied. "Mourning was essentially women's work," observes Nadia Maria El Cheikh, but it had to be controlled by men.[79]

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[76] The best survey of this topic is in Halevi's *Muhammad's Grave.*

[77] On this topic, see Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave,* 114-142.

[78] Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave,* 115.

[79] Nadia Maria El Cheikh, ""The Gendering of 'Death' in *Kitāb al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*," *Al-Qantara* 31, 2 (2010), 435.

Some Sunni pietists went so far as to declare wailing to be completely forbidden (*muḥarram*) and produced hadith in support of this stance.[80] This contrasts sharply with Shiʿi legal literature on the topic, which avoids taking a particular stance on the issue.[81] In Kufa, where the anti-wailing campaigns were strongest, some men resorted to violence or even locking women into buildings to keep them away from funerals.[82] Moreover, wailing was certainly not an activity considered suitable for men, at least not according to many proto-Sunni traditionists.

The gendered nature of mourning in early and classical Arabic settings is further evident in *marthīya* poetry. Also known as *rithāʾ,* this genre of Arabic verse was employed primarily for eulogizing a deceased beloved.[83] It was a vehicle for expressing lamentation of the deceased and inciting vengeance against those responsible for the death. Such mourning was a poetic ritual that was, according to Suzanne Stetkevych,

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[80] Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave,* 123, n. 39, 128.

[81] Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave,* 133-135.

[82] Halevi, Muhammad's Grave, 126-128

[83] On *marthīya,* see Ch. Pellat, "Marthiya: Arabic Literature," EI^2; Suzanne Stetkevych, "The Generous Eye/I and the Poetics of Redemption: An Elegy by al-Fāriʻah b. Shaddād al-Murriyah:"in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James Bellamy*, ed. M. Mir (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1993), 85-105; Pieter Smoor, "'Death, the Elusive Thief': The Classic Arabic Elegy," in *Hidden Futures: Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical and Arabico-Islamic World,* eds. J. M. Bremmer, Th. P. J. van den Hout, and R. Peters (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), 151-176; Marlè Hammond (ed.), *Transforming Loss into Beauty: essays on Arabic literature and culture in honor of Magda Al-Nowaihi,* (Cairo: American University Press, 2008); Nadia Maria El Cheikh, ""The Gendering of 'Death,'" 411-436; Marlè Hammond, *Beyond Elegy: Classical Arabic Women's Poetry in Context,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

"preeminently incumbent upon the female."[84] In fact, it was one of the only domains of classical Arabic literature dominated by women authors. Both of the earliest major figures associated with the development of *marthīya* were female—al-Khansāʾ (d. mid-7th c.) and Laylā al-Akhyalīya (d. early 8th c.).[85] Although numerous men wrote *marthīya* poetry as well, this kind of verse remained associated with the disruptive role of women's mourning which remained as ubiquitous as it was contentious.

In the face of these realities, the mourning scenes in the imams' biographies emerge as fascinating aspect of larger issues of gender, community, and memory. The biographers depicted the imams in ways that resisted mainstream Sunni sensibilities about masculinity and public order. As Halevi notes, graveside mourning during the Umayyad period was politically volatile, especially in southern Iraq where numerous anti-Umayyad rebellions had emerged. He goes on to posit that "the Kūfan attempt to ban women from funerals appears grounded in the proto-Sunni endeavor to prevent wailers from igniting rebellion. Perhaps, then, Kūfan traditions against the presence of women at funerals were on occasion directed polemically against proto-Shīʿites."[86] Halevi's observation is astute and helpful for understanding what was at stake for the biographers. The debate over mourning practices reflects general concern about social stability. The mourning practices of women and the proto-Shiᶜa disrupted that stability. By denouncing the female mourners, proto-Sunni pietists were discursively re-inscribing the gendered nature of mourning, a process that doubled as anti-Shiᶜi polemic. Public order was primarily controlled by Sunni men, and disrupting that order with emotional laments over past deaths was a feminine (Shiᶜi) intrusion on masculine (Sunni) control.[87]

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[84] Suzanne Stetkevych, "Obligations and Poetics of Gender: Women's Elegy and Blood Vengeance," in *The Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*, 161-205 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 164-165.

[85] On al-Khansāʾ, see K. A. Fariq, "al-Khansāʾ and her Poetry," *Islamic Culture* 37, (1957), 209-219; F. Gabrieli, "al-K͟hansāʾ," EI²; Clarissa Burt, "al-Khansaʾ," in *Arabic Literary Culture,* ed. Cooperson and Toorawa. On Laylā al-Akhyalīya, see "Laylā al-Ak͟hyaliyya," EI².

[86] Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 133.

The broader significance of the stories of the imams' bitter laments and the eulogies of their followers now stands in sharper relief. As David Herman has noted, "Stories do not just emanate from cultural understandings of emotion but also constitute a primary instrument for adjusting those systems of emotion terms and concepts to lived experience."[88] The biographies do not simply represent a different emotional sensibility or an alternate concept of masculinity (though both of these assertions are accurate enough in their own way). They also protest the established social order through the appropriation of a feminized focalization. By refusing to consent to an emotional logic which would strip power from the deaths of the imams, the biographers insist upon the relevance of mourning as a symbol of the enduring unjust nature of their societies.

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[87] I am here trying to point out the related power hierarchies which overlap on the topic of mourning. I am not saying that any woman who expressed laments was Shi'i any more than I am saying all powerful men were Sunni.

[88] Herman, "Cognition, Emotion, and Consciousness," 255-256.

Stetkevych points out that *marthīya* poetry structurally and ritually included an incitement to vengeance (*taḥrīd*) along with the lamentation. The two elements share an important reciprocal relationship—or as Stetkevych calls it, "interreferentiality"—in the poetry which casts the execution of vengeance as the fulfillment of the lament. The tearful mourning (prescribed to women) comes to an end once the vengeance (prescribed to men) has been achieved; and so, she writes, "women's lamentation/*rithā*ʾ is in perception and expression the inverse parallel of men's blood vengeance/*rithā*ʾ."[89]

Though carrying the analogy too far would be a mistake, similarities of context and content between *marthīya* poetry and the mourning depicted in biographies of the imams allows the former to play an illuminative role in helping us to understand the latter. Mourning for the imams (performed in the biographies by the imams and their followers) is always tearful and at times intense, protracted, and loud. The mourning performances in the biographies, like the performative aspects of *marthīya*, are intended to affect the audience with a mood that necessitates protest and a yearning for fulfillment through the rectifying of the situation. Stetkevych writes, "women's mourning must thus be understood, above all, as an obligatory public lamentation that was ritually prescribed and served to express a typically liminal defiled and yet sacral state."[90] Likewise, as I have shown in various ways throughout this study, the bodies of the imams are sacred and yet defiled through the abuse of those bodies and the denial of their rights. Mourning for the imams functions as a constant reminder of that injustice, and it calls for revenge. Until suitable vengeance comes to pass, the lamentation must continue.

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[89] Stetkevych, "Obligations and Poetics of Gender," 167.

[90] Stetkevych, "Obligations and Poetics of Gender," 165.

V.C. Completing the Circle: Consolation for a Community

This brings us to our final task. Up to this point, I have left the most important character in this story on the periphery: the "reader,"[91] who is always present in these accounts. I have noted various ways in which the community may be engaged with the texts in the communal process of constructing meaning. But a few more specific comments are due here before concluding this study.

The precise audience which received each of the five works considered in this study is exceedingly difficult to determine with any certainty, and few uniform statements will apply. The *Ithbāt* and *Dalāʾil* seem to have been compiled with devotional concerns at the foreground whereas al-Mufīd's *al-Irshād* and al-Ṭabrisī's *Iʿlām* have more academic and text-oriented interests at play. Ibn Shahrāshūb tried to bring all of that together in his masterful *Manāqib.* But these tentative sketches tell us little. There may be good reason, however, to resist the urged to cast these works as either "scholarly" (thus elite, and read few) or "popular" (and therefore widespread among the masses).[92] Jonathan Berkey argues that during this general period in the Arabic-speaking world, the boundaries between scholarly and lay discourses were often blurred. The role of preaching and storytelling was particularly important in this regard.[93] And here, the biographies of the imams appear a likely hinge for the Shiʿa. Not only do the stories seem to have a strong narratological quality to them which lends them well to preaching, but this literature appears to have been a resource for teachers and preachers through this period.[94] Furthermore, the biographies of the imams grew as a genre in subsequent centuries and were appropriated by Sufi/chivalry groups at times.[95] The famed propagator of Twelver Shiʿism of the Safavid period, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, worked on expanding the audience for the collective biographies of the imams by writing one of his own in Persian, *Jalāʾ al-ʿUyūn*.

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[91] Here I mean audience, broadly speaking, whether reading or hearing.

The question here, however, is less about determining the precise original audience, but rather considering what response from that audience the biographers appear to have expected, or perhaps desired. By thinking more specifically about the community which received and passed on these stories, the social functions of the texts come to the fore. The emotional outpourings of the imams is but one critical example that helps highlight what these works were *doing* in addition to what they were saying. Discourse is a social performance which has certain effects,[96] and here I seek to isolate the way the biographies affected the reader/audience emotionally. How did the biographies guide their readers' feelings about themselves, their community, and their world?

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[92] See Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History," 1402; Burke, "History as Social Memory," 109; Olick and Robbins, "Social Memory Studies," 127; Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet,* 47-50.

[93] Jonathan P. Berkey, *Popular Preaching & Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 88-96.

[94] Al-Mufīd uses many of the same pieces his lectures collected in *al-Amālī.* Or consider the 12th century scholar al-Fattāl al-Nīshābūrī whose book of sermons (*Rawḍat al-wāʾiẓīn*) draws upon this literature significantly.

[95] For other examples of this genre in this period and later, see appendix I. Kāshifī's 16th century *Futūvat-nāmah-i Sultānī* is an excellent example of how the material was used in Sufi circles. The undeniable popularity of another Kāshifī work that drew upon the biographies, *Rawḍat al-shuhadāʾ,* further suggests a broad appeal for this literature. See also Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs,* 175-177.

As should be clear by now, emotional qualities of the biographies are visible and readily accessible. In a lecture to his students, al-Mufīd recited a tradition in which Imam al-Ṣādiq said, "tests and trials begin with us and then with you, and the times of ease begin with us and then with you."[97] The direction of movement outlined here, from the imams to their followers is an assumed path throughout. The trials that affected the imams affect their followers; and release from those trials will come to the community from the imams as well. Thus, the emotions displayed by the imams are central to our reflection on the effects of the literature as a whole.

When I first began the research for this dissertation nearly three years ago, I intended to focus on the suffering of the imams. It was clear from my initial familiarity with the biographies that this was a critical theme. But as the study moved forward, that framing felt increasingly parochial. To focus on the suffering of the imams would suggest that the significance of the literature was located in that experience of the imams. But I felt drawn toward the response of the community to the literature more broadly. The needs and interests of this community drive the basic structures, themes, and motifs of this literature. And so throughout this study I have attempted to discern a dominant and pervasive mood or orientation around which the stories seem to revolve. Perhaps this mood is best summarized in the concept of consolation.

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[96] See Athena Athanasiou, Pothiti Hantzaroula, and Kostas Yannakopoulous, "Towards a New Epistemology: The 'Affective Turn,'" *Historein* 8, (2008), 5-16. Or, as Judith Perkins writes, "Although discourses do not represent 'reality,' they do have very real effects": *The Suffering Self,* 3.

[97] Al-Mufīd, *Al Amaali,* 285.

Consolation includes, even presumes, grief as a starting point; but it points to the response. It is a response to the need to process suffering, grief, and loss. In this way, consolation is both cathartic and redemptive. The inherent linking of sorrow and hope that occurs through consolation encapsulates the precise function that I think these biographies serve for the community which remembers them.

The suffering of the imams undoubtedly evokes a mood of sorrow throughout the biographies. That suffering is not only their betrayals endured, denial of rights, and martyrdoms, but also the sorrow that they feel themselves on each other's behalf. In this way, their tears become truly exemplary in that they project the appropriate emotional response to the stories. The imams model how these stories ought to be received. In another lecture by al-Mufīd, he recited an elegy attributed to Fāṭima al-Zahrāʾ. The final portion of it reads,

> Men have attacked us and humiliated us,
> after the Prophet, and all wealth has been usurped;
> The perpetrator of injustices to us will know his fate

on the day of judgment, where he will finally land.
We have come across things which no one before us,
neither from Arabs nor from the Ajam have suffered;
So, we shall continue weeping over you as long as we live,
and as long as we have eyes which well up with flowing tears.[98]

The call to mourning as a type of protest is clear. And many Shiʿi poets take up this call. In an excerpt quoted by Ibn Shahrāshūb, the poet al-Surūjī says,

Don't be surprised that I have followed
your noble and strong voice
With good intention and insight
and patience for my victorious savior.
Truly I want to stand
before you as a funerary mourner (*nāʾiḥat al-janāʾiz*)
Who, while striking wounds, keeps
remembrance amidst the commotion.[99]

Another piece in *Manāqib,* attributed to Ibn al-Rūmī, says,

O, family of Muḥammad's house! My sorrow is for you,
it has weakened my patience and strength.
How the fangs of calamities have penetrated
into you, dividing the oppressor from oppressed.
Every mourner is wailing for you
lamenting you in an ever-renewing funeral commemoration (*maʾtam*)[100]

Such examples are numerous. But the mourning is not all that remains. There is hope.[101] In some cases within the biographies, even as people wept for good reasons, the imams encouraged them to cease. I showed in the last chapter that those who betray the imams often met a dire fate in this lifetime, an act of divine justice. But at other times, it was clearly a hope for justice in the next life that served as the consolation. When Zaynab, the daughter of ʿAlī and Fāṭima, wept and mourned tragedy occurring at Karbalāʾ, her brother, Imam al-Ḥusayn said to her, "Sister, fear God and take comfort in the consolation of God [*bi-ʿazāʾ Allāh*]. Know that the people on the earth will die and the inhabitants will be destroyed except the face of God Who created creation by His power (*qudra*)."[102]

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[98] Al-Mufīd, Al Amaali, 61-62. The occasion for Fāṭima's grief within the larger narrative is said to be Abū Bakr's denial of her right to Fadak (mentioned in chapter three). But we can see here how quickly it slips into representing the general fate of the family and her injustice is the injustice which has befallen them all. The vengeance called for is expected at the Day of Judgment.

[99] *Manāqib,* III: 161.

[100] *Manāqib,* IV: 245-246.

[101] In fact, there are numerous instances when an imam wept at a particular junction in the narrative meant to inspire this hope, particularly the birth or designation of a future imam.

The hope which consoles those mourning the fate of the imams is found in the power of God and, more specifically, in the expected return of the Mahdī. The time when God will bring the people back into contact with the imam is site of inspiration throughout the biographies. In one account in the *Dalāʾil,* the section on the Mahdī includes a story of the Prophet Muḥammad. A companion (ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd) finds him weeping and asks him why he is crying. The Prophet gave this reply:

> It's the *Ahl al-bayt.* God has chosen the world's last days for us. My *Ahl al-bayt* will endure being killed, chased, and banished from their land until God ordains the banner to come from the east. The one who waves [the banner] will do so, and the one who delights in it will do so. Then a man will emerge among them from my *Ahl al-bayt*; his name is like mine and his features are like mine. My people will return to him like birds return to their nests. For he will fill the land with justice like [it] is filled with oppression.[103]

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[102] *Al-Irshād,* II: 94 (Eng: 348-349).

[103] *Dalāʾil,* 232.

Misfortune is embraced as part of God's plan for the select. But for every trial endured, there is a coming retribution. And as much as the world may be filled with cruelty today, the Mahdī will equally fill the world with justice at the proper time. The final line of this quote is a widely cited phrase (in various forms) that was popular among many proto-Shiʿa revolutionary and apocalyptic movements, including those who originally supported the ʿAbbāsid revolution. But the placement of this passage in the section on the Mahdī, after the author has recounted the many trials endured by the imams at the hands of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs, is a clear assurance to the readers that the Prophet's promise is still valid. Hope remains.

I introduced this dissertation with questions about what made Shiʿi forms of Islam distinct (in the eyes of many throughout history at least) from Sunni ones. And as I suggested there, I would contend that the perception of difference and otherness which has been pervasive for Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims cannot be reduced to a debate about historical events, even the myriad of ones addressed within this literature. The function of these biographies is not just about challenging a particular narrative of history—where history is understood as a set of events—but intervening in the way people feel about that history. The biographies unsettle indifference. They consistently move the reader in ways that make sorrow intelligible and hope tangible. That is a narrative of consolation that would be meaningful for any community which finds itself on the losing side of history.

Peter Burke once wrote, “what happens in the case of these myths is that differences between past and present are elided, and unintended consequences are turned into conscious aims, as if the main purpose of these past heroes had been to bring about the present—our present.”[104] Burke was not writing about specifically religious texts, but rather historical writings in general. A similar assessment would make sense of the biographies. And this particular literature, by placing the biographies of all of the infallibles together, side by side, also elides the differences between the imams. Chronology, as a result, is constantly thwarted in the biographies through visions, dreams, memories, and miraculous journeys. It is no great leap of logic to place one’s own grief parallel to the imams and to hope with them for a just redemption.

V.D. Summary of Observations

Judith Perkins, in her work on early Christian narratives of pain and suffering, writes,

> The power of discourse inheres precisely in this remarkable ability it has to set its agenda and mask the fact that its representation both has an agenda and that there could be other representations and other agendas. Every representation is by its very nature partial and incomplete. A representation of “reality” must leave something out, even as it puts something in. A culture’s discourse represents not the “real” world, but rather a world mediated through social categories, relations, and institutions operating in the specific culture.[105]

All of the biographers of the imams were making claims about history. Their works contested a particular version of history and revised it (to differing degrees) with another version. But the power of this literature, as Perkins comments on discourse generally, was in the agenda and purpose conveyed through the historical narrative. Communal memory was at stake and the biographers often focused on stories they felt were suppressed. Particularly of note here, the biographers present the imams as having died martyrs' deaths, and that they intend those deaths to be perceived as sorrowful events. A closer examination of these aspects of the biographies reveals some important points.

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[104] Burke, “History as Social Memory,” 110.

[105] Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 2-3.

The example of the martyrdoms of the imams is particularly instructive precisely because it was neither universally agreed upon nor considered necessary by some early Shiʿi Muslims. Al-Mufīd's work makes this strikingly evident. As Twelver Shiʿism developed, however, the weight of the larger narrative of salvation history made any finale but martyrdom unthinkable. Despite al-Mufīd's unparalleled influence on this genre, his comments on this matter were largely ignored and have essentially been forgotten in the meta-narrative of Shiʿi social memory. The cultural negotiation of meaning restricted the possibilities of what could be said, even as it broadened them in other areas. The unnatural and unjust deaths of the imams helped stabilize the tone of the biographies, one that underscored the need for consolation. This observation conforms to what has been seen in previous chapters and attests the categorical logic which this literature facilitates.

Further, particular memories have specific effects for a community. The biographers of the imams were concerned as much with affect as they were with remembering what happened. They helped negotiate and consolidate a particular type of emotional response to the memory of the imams. The biographies are unique not because they cultivate emotion;[106] rather, they are unique in the specific mood cultivated and the manner in which the emotional logic is constructed for the community. The biographers were consistent in representing the imams as men who mourned and cried over the tragedy of *ahl al-bayt* and the disorder that ensued. The appropriateness of such a reaction is clearly emphasized throughout. By embracing a feminized form of protest against the social order dominated by Sunnis, Shiᶜi Muslims challenged the notion that any just social order could exist prior to the return of al-Mahdī. Tethering their own religious identity to the necessity of justice for *ahl al-bayt* shaped the contours of Shiᶜi social memory and provided it with lasting "boundary, fixity, and surface."[107]

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[106] Although other types of biography and historical writing may attempt to obscure its affect on the readers, emotion and rationality remain discursively entwined. The proto-Sunni pietists insistence, for example, on reacting to death with patience and austerity was itself an assertion of proper emotion, not the negation of emotion.

[107] See Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 12, quoting Judith Butler.

Conclusion

> "To be a member of any human community is to situate oneself with regard to one's (its) past, if only by rejecting it."
> -Eric Hobsbawm[1]

This study focused upon the Shiᶜi communal boundaries of the 10th to 12th centuries through their memories of the imams. These memories were themselves social acts which enforced certain types of differences between Sunni and Shiᶜi communities. I have not attempted to define the true nature of that boundary or to concede that such a division must exist at all. Like all social boundaries, the line of division Sunni and Shiᶜa was fluid and constantly in flux. What constituted the fundamental difference between a Sunni and Shiᶜi Muslim has been imagined in a variety of ways historically. To the extent which social groups (religious or otherwise) collectively agree on the specific nature of a division, that boundary is real and effective. Those boundaries are not created in a vacuum; they are tightly bound to narratives of the past and stories of people. In this study, however, I have attempted to trace how that boundary was being imagined by some prominent Shiᶜi thinkers within a particular literature.

In chapter one, I provided essential information about the formative stage of the genre under consideration, collective biographies of the imams, composed in Arabic between the 10th and 12th centuries CE. This study is the first to identify and analyze this specific literary genre as distinct from the closely-related genres of hadith, history, prosopography, and hagiography. The collective biographies of the imams exhibit unique structural and thematic patterns related to, and productive of, certain generic expectations. Written in a period when Shiᶜism was still evolving into an increasingly distinct community of memory, these texts reflect an array of socio-religious concerns of the Twelver Shiᶜa community. By grouping these texts together into one genre, we can better discern the moods and motivations sustained by this literature.

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[1] Eric Hobsbawm, "The social Function of the Past: Some Questions," *Past and Present* 55, (1972): 3.

Beginning in chapter two, I began my analysis of the texts with an assessment of the accounts related to the births of the imams. The birth narratives are full of symbolic and fantastic stories, yet they highlight concrete and practical concerns. The historical lives of the imams had cosmic significance, through whom God had chosen to hold together the material world. We see in the stories of the imams' corporeal beginnings—which naturally incorporates their physical and spiritual ties with Muḥammad and Fāṭima—that they were set apart and thoroughly unique beings. The world trembled at their presence and miraculous events served to validate their roles as inheritors of the prophet's authority. This validation was critical to the legitimacy of this particular lineage of men, separating the Twelver community from all other groups (Shiᶜi or otherwise) who might claim authority. The light of the imams moved from their fathers' sacred seed to their mothers' chaste wombs and on into their childhoods in ways that dazzle, inspire, and demand loyalty.

The imams were humans with real bodies, in all the glorious and vulnerable potentials that entails. Their bodies, therefore, were simultaneously the sites of intense devotion and great anxiety. Chapter three investigated the ways in which the biographers remembered the imams' bodies and their bodily performances. In so doing, particular constructions of the imams' masculinity emerged to the fore. They were strong, beautiful, learned, and pious men. The imams were considered the best of all men, and yet their bodies were subjected to the will of others. The precarious balance between being the greatest of men while lacking the temporal authority they deserved functioned as an analogue to the Shiʿi community itself. The biographers were particularly able to balance the dangerously emasculating position of victim through the retelling of the imams' miracles. The thaumaturgical capabilities of the imams enabled them to go beyond the restriction put on their bodies and provide the audience with a view of the full range of the imams' true power and authority. The efforts to maintain the integrity of the imams' masculinity further dictated the manner in which Fāṭima, and other revered women in the biographies, could be meaningfully honored.

The fourth chapter explored the most essential narratological component of the biographies, the betrayals of the imams. For the Shiʿi biographers who saw their own communities as threatened and persecuted by other Muslims, the betrayals experienced by the imams simultaneously made sense of the writers' pasts and their presents. Through an analysis of several different examples, this chapter highlighted the pervasive social anxiety which lied as a subtext to the imams' biographies. While the dramatic martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn at Karbālāʾ is the most renowned instance, the imams all suffered at the hands of traitors. Each imam's fate is tied to their unique role as spiritual inheritor (*waṣī*) of the prophet, and by powerfully tying a conceptual knot between prophet, imam, and community, the authors linked the narratives of all three. The Shiʿi community itself is thus distinguished by the loss of their due rights, like the *ahl al-bayt* in general, due to the unjust system of order determined by those who betray. Difference, in this way, was discursively enacted. The desire to clearly delineate the boundaries between their own community and that of others is seen in the consistent cycle of fate of each of the imams, and it functioned as a reminder to the faithful of the treacherous dangers posed by others.

The final chapter addressed the broad effect of this literature on how the imams were remembered by the community. The logical necessity of specific accounts in the biographies, particularly the imams' martyrdoms, was clear through a close reading. The imams *must* have been men who had exceptional births, performed miracles, and suffered betrayals leading to their murderous deaths. Any other narrative became unthinkable within this genre. We also saw that the biographers intended specific communal responses, perhaps most clearly observed through the topic of weeping and mourning. In light of the social context of the biographers, wherein excessive weeping/mourning was often considered to be an inappropriate activity in which only irrational women would engage, the biographies recorded a remarkable amount of lamentations of various forms. The imams and their followers wept, sometimes excessively, at nearly every turn of the narrative arc. The upholding of Shiʿi identity was buttressed by the performance of weeping, wailing, and/or mourning. These actions not only made communal difference visible and concrete, it did so through an implicit assertion about the appropriateness of specific thoughts and feelings in relationship to the imams. In this way, the Shiʿi community staked a religious claim on the cosmic meaning and the eternal relevance of the imams' lives—from their births to their deaths—as well as the critical importance of remembering their stories.

Throughout this study, I have explored the communal construction of meaning through social memory, and how systems of meaning emerge from this process in ways that regulate what can be meaningfully asserted about the past. The biographies of the imams presented us with a particular example, with its own unique and fascinating contours. But the phenomenon is not unique to Shiʿism. Despite the temptation to assume Shiʿi scholars were particularly prone to alter historical accounts in order to fit their belief systems, all communities do this. There is no unbiased telling of history. That this process or, at times, motivation may be clear within this literature may have more to tell us about the nature of institutionalized power in medieval Muslim academic circles and the relative marginalization of Shiʿi scholars from the centers of influence. Although there were some cooperative Sunni-Shiʿi efforts throughout the medieval period and occasions when Shiʿi scholars had privileged access to political rulers, these biographies enshrine a deep suspicion of, alienation from, and anxiety about the reigning institutions of power.

Appendix: Other Biographies of the Imams[711]

In addition to the five works analyzed in this study, I want to draw attention to other early and late contributions to this genre. I briefly mention here some of the works which fit the genre outlined in this study but upon which I did not focus. In three groupings, there are: (1) the smaller and lesser-known works up to 13th century; (2) works from the 13th century through the Safavid period, especially those of al-Bahrānī and al-Majlisī; and (3) modern works.

LESSER-KNOWN EARLY WORKS

There are several works from the first few centuries of this genre that were considered for comparison's sake. Some of them are simply too brief to have been particularly useful to this study, occasionally consisting of no more than a few pages. This includes Ibn Abī al-Thalj's (d. 325/936) *Tārīkh al-a'imma*,[712] Ibn Khashāb al-Baghdādī's (d.

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[711] As I work to bring this project toward a book manuscript, I would like to give some attention to non-Imami works that overlap with this genre or are very similar in nature. It would be particularly interesting to look at *al-Hidāyat al-kubrá,* written by the 10th century Nusayrī, al-Khasībī (d. 346/957). And the same could be said for Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 654/1256) *Tadhkirat al-khawāṣṣ*, and Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's (d. 855/1451-2) *al-Fuṣūl al-muhimma fī maʿrifat al-a'imma*, written by a Hanafi and Malaki, respectively. Finally, Zaydī and Ismaʿīlī Shiʿa also wrote on the lives of their imams—though to a lesser extent than Twelvers—and these works might provide helpful contrasts with the Imami perspectives. In this regard, the Zaydī *al-Ifāda fī tārīkh al-a'imma al-sāda* by al-Nāṭiq bi'l-Ḥaqq (d. 424/1032-3) may be a place to begin.

[712] Abū Bakr, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ismāʿīl, al-Baghdādī, known as Ibn Abī al-Thalj: al-Najāshī, v. 2, 299-300, #1038, al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, v. 3, 218, #806; Kaḥḥāla, v. 3, 102, #12003; Aḥmad Pākatchī, "Ibn Abī al-Thalj (2)," *DMBI*, v. 2, 633-634. Ibn Abī al-Thalj, *Tārīkh al-a'imma, in Majmūʿa nafīsa fī tārīkh al-aʾimma: min āthār al-qudamāʾ min ʿulamāʾ al-imāmīya al-thuqāh,* ed. Maḥmūd al-Ḥusaynī al-Marʿashī (Beirut: Dār al-Qāriʾ, 2002): 9-27.

567/1172) *Tārīkh mawālīd al-a'imma wa wafīyātihim,*[713] and Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī's *Tāj al-mawālīd.*[714] Several other important early works focus only on one particular theme throughout the lives of the imams. Such is the case with Ibn ʻAbd al-Wahhāb's (11th cent.) *ʻUyūn al-muʻjizāt*[715] and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī's (d. 573/1178) *Kharā'ij wa'l-jarāyih,*[716] which both center on the miracles attributed to the imams. I also consider al-Ḥasan b. ʻAlī al-Ḥarrānī's (10th c.) *Tuḥaf al-ʻuqūl ʻan āl al-Rasūl* in this group due to the heavy emphasis on the teachings of the imams,[717] creating a work more closely akin to conventional hadith collections than the genre I am outlining. A few other works overlap significantly in content with the biographies but are structured in alternate fashions. Here I would mention the early work by Naṣr b. ʻAlī Jahḍamī (d. 250/854-5), *Tārīkh ahl al-bayt: naql^{an} ʻan al-a'imma al-Bāqir wa'l-Ṣādiq wa'l-Riḍā wa'l-ʻAskarī ʻan ābā'ihim.*[718] Also of note is Abū Manṣūr al-Ṭabrisī's (d. *ca.* 620/1223) *al-Iḥtijāj,*[719] which preserves many disputations of the imams with their opponents, and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Fattāl's (d. 508/1114-5) *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn,*[720] which addresses many theological and ethical questions of Shiᶜism.[721]

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[713] Abū Muḥammad, ʻAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. ʻAbd Allāh b. Naṣr, al-Baghdādī, known as Ibn Khashāb: al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa*, v. 3, 217-218, #805; Kaḥḥāla v. 2, 221, #7771; Muḥammad Fāḍilī, "Ibn Khashāb, Abū Muḥammad," *DMBI,* v. 3, 419-420. This work is also known as *Tārīkh al-a'imma*. Ibn Khashāb, *Tārīkh mawālīd al-a'imma wa wafīyātihim,* in *Majmūʻa nafīsa,* ed. al-Marʻashī, 119-150.

[714] Al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 3, 209, #772. al-Ṭabrisī, *Tāj al-mawālīd,* in *Majmūʻa nafīsa,* ed. al-Marʻashī, 65-117.

[715] Al-Ḥusayn b. ʻAbd al-Wahhāb: al-ᶜĀmilī, 346, 350?; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 15, 383-385; # 2390; Kaḥḥāla, v. 1, 621, #4680.

[716] Saʻīd b. ʻAbd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥubba Allāh b. al-Ḥasan al-Rāwandī (Quṭb al-Dīn): *GAL* S I, 710; al-ᶜĀmilī, v. 35, 16, 24; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 7, 145-146, #802; Kaḥḥāla, v. 1, 765, #5695; E. Kohlberg, "Rāvandī, Qoṭb-al-dīn," Eir.

[717] Abū Muḥammad, al-Ḥasan b. ʻAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Shuʻba, al-Ḥarrānī al-Ḥalabī: al-ᶜĀmilī, *Aʻyān*, v. 22, 318-321, #4326; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa*, v. 3, 400, #1435; Kaḥḥāla, v. 1, 567, #4258. Al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-ʻuqūl* (Eng: *Tuhaf al-Uqoul: The Masterpieces of the Intellects*).

[718] The title is also known as *Tārīkh āl al-Rasūl.* Jahḍamī, *Tārīkh ahl al-bayt: naql^{an} ʻan al-a'imma al-Bāqir wa-al-Ṣādiq wa-al-Riḍā wa-al-ʻAskarī ʻan ābā'ihim,* (Qum: Dalīl Mā, 1426 [2005 or 2006]).

13TH CENTURY THROUGH THE SAFAVID PERIOD

The genre of collective biographies of the imams continued to flourish after Ibn Shahrāshūb and was masterfully utilized during the Safavid period. These works stand outside the formative stage of the genre, but it is only through these later works that the full impact of the earlier works are perceived. Among the well-known works from this period are: *Maṭālib al-suʿūl fī manāqib āl al-rasūl* by Ibn Ṭalḥa (d. 652/1254);[722] *Kashf al-ghumma fī maᶜrifat al-a'imma* by al-Irbilī (d. 1293);[723] *Rāḥat al-arvāḥ* by Shīʿī Sabzavārī (14th c.);[724] *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn fī asrār Amīr al-Mu'minīn* by al-Bursī (fl. late-14th c.);[725] *al-*

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[719] Abū Mansūr, Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Abī Talib al-Ṭabrisī: *GAL* S I, 709; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 1, 281-282, #1472; Kaḥḥāla, v. 1, 203, #1509; E. Kohlberg, "al-Ṭabrisī (Ṭabarsī), Abū Mansūr," EI^2. Al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj,* ed. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Kharasān, 2 volumes ([Najaf]: Dār al-Nuʿmān, 1966).

[720] Abū ᶜAlī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ᶜAlī b. Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Fattāl, al-Nisābūrī (al-Fārisī): Khwānsārī, v. 6, 253-262; *GAL* I, 513; al-Tihrani, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 11, 305, #1815; Kaḥḥāla, v. 3, 225, # 12821. al-Fattāl, *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn,* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbūʿāt, 1986).

[721] These two works are also of importance in this study since the two authors were both teachers of Ibn Shahrāshūb.

[722] Abū Sālim, Muḥammad b. Ṭalḥa b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan ʿAdawī, Kamāl al-Dīn, al-Nasībī: ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ṭabāṭabā'ī, "Ibn Ṭalḥa, Abū Sālim," *DMBI* v. 4, 144-145.

[723] Abū al-Ḥasan, ᶜAlī b. ᶜĪsá b. Abī al-Fatḥ al-Irbilī, Bahā' al-Dīn: *GAL* S I, 713; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 18, 47-48, #619; Kaḥḥāla, v. 2, 484, #9805; Jaᶜfarīyān, Muḥammad Riḍā Nājī, "IrbilI," *DMBI* v. 7, 431-434.

[724] Abū Saʿīd (or Abū ʿAlī), al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn (or b. Muḥammad) al-Bayhaqī, al-Sabzavārī: al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 10, 55, #14; al-ᶜĀmilī, *Aᶜyān,* v. 21, 202-204, #4085. This is one of the earliest extant works of

Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm ilá mustaḥiqq al-taqdīm by ʿAlī b. Yūnus al-Bayāḍī (d. 877/1472);[726] *Rawẓat al-shuhadā*ʾ by Kāshifī (d. 910/1504-5);[727] and *Tawḍīḥ al-maqāṣid* by Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1031/1622).[728]

There are two scholars from the Safavid period, however, that deserve particular mention: Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1696)[729] and ʿAllāma Majlisī (d. 1110/1698-9).[730] The two of them are giants of Shiʿi scholarship from the 17th century

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this genre written originally in Persian. Shīʿī Sabzavārī, *Rāḥat al-arvāḥ: dar sharḥ-i zindagī, faẓāʾil va muʿajazzāt-i aʾimma-i Aṭhār,* (Tehran: Ahl-i Qalam: Daftar-i Nashr-i Mīrās-i Maktūb, 1375 [1996 or 1997]).

[725] Rajab b. Muḥammad b. Rajab, al-Bursī al-Ḥillī, al-Shaykh al-Ajl al-Ḥāfiẓ, Raḍī al-Dīn: *GAL* S II, 204, 661; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 21, 34, #3826; "Bursī," *DMBI* v. 11, 713-715.

[726] Abū Muḥammad, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. Yūnus, al-Bayādī al-Nibāṭī al-ᶜĀmilī, Zayn al-Dīn: al-ᶜĀmilī, *Aʿyān,* v. 42, 31-31; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 15, 36-37, # 219; Kaḥḥāla, v. 2, 519, #10061; Muḥammad Kāẓim ʿAlavī, "Bayāḍī, Zayn al-Dīn," *DMBI* v. 13, 243-244. Al-Bayāḍī, *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm ilá mustahiqqī al-taqdīm,* ed. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Buhbūdī ([Tehran]: al-Maktabah al-Murtadawīyah, 1384-[1964 or 1965-]).

[727] Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī Kāshifī, Kamāl al-Dīn, al-Vāʿiẓ ("the preacher"): al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīᶜa,* v. 11, 294-295, #1775; Gholam Hosein Yousofi, "Kāshifī," EI^{2}. This work breaks with the general conventions of the genre in several ways—and is of questionable inclusion—but its general influence on popular Shiʿi expressions of piety and the fact that most of the narratives within it concern the Shiʿi imams, makes it worth considering alongside the other works of this analysis. See, P. Chelkowski, "Rawḍa-khwānī," EI^{2}. Kāshifī, *Rawẓat al-shuhadā*ʾ, ed. Muḥammad Riẓā Iftikhārzādah (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mudabbir, 1384 [2005]).

[728] Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd al-Samad al-ᶜĀmilī, Bahāʾ al-Dīn: *GAL* II, 414, 415 and S II, 595-597; al-ᶜĀmilī, *A'yan,* v. 44, 216-257; al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīᶜa, v. 4, 498, #2232; Kaḥḥāla, v. 3, 251, #12998; C. E. Bosworth, *Baha' al-Din al-ᶜĀmilī and his Literary Anthologies*, (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1989); E. Kohlberg, "Bahā'-al-Dīn ʿĀmelī," Eir; C. E. Bosworth, "al-ᶜĀmilī," *EAL*. Al-ʿĀmilī, *Tawḍīḥ al-maqāṣid,* in *Majmūʿa nafīsa,* ed. al-Marʿashī, 355-371.

[729] Hāshim b. Sulaymān b. Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd al-Jawād al-Ḥusaynī, al-Bahrānī: *GAL* S II, 506, 533; Kaḥḥāla, v. 4, 51, #17789; W. Madelung, "Bahrānī, Hāŝem," Eir; Mahdī Maṭīʿ, "Bahrānī, Hāshim b. Sulaymān," *DMBI* v. 11, 386-387.

[730] Muḥammad Bāqir b. Muḥammad Taqī, Majlisī al-Thānī: *GAL* S II, 572-574; al-ᶜĀmilī, *A'yan,* v. 44, 96-101; Kaḥḥāla, v. 3, 154, 155, # 12349; Abdul-Hadi Hairi, "Madjlisī, Mullā Muḥammad Bākir," EI^{2}; J. Cooper, "al-

whose contributions stand apart for a couple of reasons. First, the sheer magnitude of their contributions was unprecedented. al-Baḥrānī penned three separate collections on the lives of the imams, each of which was several volumes in length: (1) *Ghāyat al-marām wa-ḥujjat al-khiṣām fī taʻyīn al-imām min ṭarīq al-khāṣṣ wa-al-ʻāmm;*[731] (2) *Ḥilyat al-abrār fī aḥwāl Muḥammad wa-Ālihi al-aṭhār;*[732] and (3) *Madīnat maʻājiz: al-aʼimma al-ithna ʻashar wa-dalāʼil al-ḥujaj ʻalá al-bashar.*[733] Majlisī also made significant contributions to this genre of literature. His unparalleled collection Shiʿi hadith, *Biḥār al-anwār*,[734] includes within it several volumes devoted to the lives of the imams. Furthermore, he also composed a more accessible version of the biographies in Persian, entitled *Jalāʼ al-ʿuyūn: tārīkh-i chahārdah maʿṣūm.*[735] Second, though Baḥrānī and Majlisī were contemporaries, they represented two distinct geographical settings of the Shiʿi intellectual tradition. The former lived in Bahrain, was heavily influenced by the

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Majlisī," *EAL*; Colin P. Turner, "The Rise of Twelver Shi'ite Externalism in Safavid Iran and its Consolidation under ʻAllāma Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī," PhD Thesis, (University of Durham, 1989).

[731] al-Baḥrānī, *Ghāyat al-marām wa-ḥujjat al-khiṣām fī taʻyīn al-Imām min ṭarīq al-khāṣṣ wa-al-ʻāmm,* 7 volumes, ed. ʻAlī ʻĀshūr (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Tārīkh al-ʻArabī, 2001). See, al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, v. 16, 21-22; #76.

[732] al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār fī aḥwāl Muḥammad wa-ālihi al-aṭhār,* 5 volumes, ed. Ghulām Riḍā Mawlānā al-Burūjirdī (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Maʻārif al-Islāmīya, 1411- [1990 or 1991-]). See, al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, v. 7, 79-80, #424.

[733] al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat maʻājiz: al-aʼimma al-ithnay ʻashar wa-dalāʼil al-ḥujaj ʻalá al-bashar,* 8 volumes, ed. ʻIzzat Allāh al-Mawlāʼī al-Hamdānī (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Maʻārif al-Islāmīyah, 1413-1416 [1992 or 1993-1995]). See, al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, v. 20, 253-254, #2834.

[734] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār al-jāmiʻa li-durar akhbār al-aʼimma al-aṭhār,* 44 volumes, ed. Maḥmūd Duryāb Najafī and Jalāl al-Dīn ʻAlī Ṣaghīr (Beirut: Dār al-Taʻārif lil-Maṭbūʻāt, 2001). See, al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, v. 3, 16-27, #43.

[735] Majlisī, *Jalāʼ al-ʿuyūn: tārīkh-i chahārdah maʿṣūm,* (Qum: Surūr, [1381] 2002). See, al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, v. 5, 124-125, #512. This was translated into Arabic about a century later: idem, v. 5, 125, #513.

thought of al-Astarābādī, and is counted among the great Akhbārī Shiʿa of his time. The latter worked closely with the Safavid court in Isfahan and is noted for his role in the persecution of Sunnis and Sufis. Together, they demonstrate the extent to which the genre considered here was a useful and popular literature across the major Imami subgroups.

MODERN WORKS

The genre of collective biographies of the imams is vibrant and growing to this day. Shiʿi scholars over the last two centuries have continued to reformulate and retellings of the imams lives in this literary form, demonstrating the ongoing utility and relevance of the literature to their religious lives. This study, therefore, will make occasional note of which formative features of the genre have been retained or changed across time, particularly in contemporary expressions. I give special attention to the works of two scholars due to the weight of their perceived authority among many contemporary Shiʿa. ʿAbbās Qummī (d. 1941), who was the compiler of the hugely popular collection of Shiʿi prayers, *Mafātiḥ al-jinān*, also penned an acclaimed two-volume work on the lives of the imams, entitled, *Muntahá al-āmāl*. It is carefully written in a user-friendly manner and is read among many contemporary Shiʿa. Another work which deserves special mention, though much shorter, is ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *Shīʿeh dar Islām*. Although this work does not fit the genre exactly and is written as a general introduction to Shiʿism, the author devotes a significant portion of the book to retelling the lives of each of the imams—itself indicative of the central significance of these stories to Shiʿi identity. Furthermore, the work has been translated into English and has been a critical resource for the growing number of English speaking Shiʿa across the world today.[736]

A few other notable modern works relevant to this study include Sharīf al-Jawāhir's (d. 1897) *Muthīr al-aḥzān fī aḥwāl al-a'immah al-ithnā ʿashar*;[737] Hāshim Maʿrūf Ḥasanī's two-volume *Ṣīrāṭ al-a'imma al-ithnā ʿashar*;[738] ᶜAlī Muḥammad ᶜAlī Dukhayyil's two-volume *A'immatunā*; Muḥammad Muḥammadī Ishtihārdī's three-volume *Sīrat al-maʿṣūmīn al-arbaʿat ʿashar*; and Mahdī Pīshvā'ī's recent *Sīrah-yi pīshvāyān*. A few scholars have recently expanded further on this genre and produced some truly massive scholarly contributions. In 2009, Mahdī Khalīl Jaʿfar published a 16-volume work on the lives of the imams, entitled, *al-Mawsūʿa al-kubrá li- Ahl al-Bayt*. And Bāqir Sharīf al-Qurashī has recently finished having his biographies of each of the imams collected and translated into English in a 14-volume set, entitled, *The Fourteen Infallibles in the History of Islam*. In a unique modern twist on the genre, Mahmood Davari has put together *Taṣvīr-i khānavādeh-i Payāmbar dar Dā'irat al-maʿārif-i Islām: tarjumeh va naqd*. In it, Davari has collected and translated into Persian the articles on each of the imams found in EI^2 and added his own commentary and critique at the end of each.[739]

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[736] Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shīʿeh dar Islām,* (Qum: Daftar-i Tablīghāt-i Islāmī, 1348 [1969]), 109-154. English translation: *Shiʿite Islam,* tr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 173-214.

[737] Sharīf al-Jawāhir, *Muthīr al-aḥzān fī aḥwāl al-a'imma al-ithnā ʿashar,* (Najaf: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Ḥaydarīyah, 1966).

[738] Hāshim Maʿrūf Ḥasanī, *Ṣīrāṭ al-a'imma al-ithnā ʿashar,* 2 volumes (Beirut: Dār al-Taʿāruf, 1977.)

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[739] Mahmood Davari, *Taṣvīr-i khānavādeh-i Payāmbar dar Dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i Islām: tarjumeh va naqd* (Qum: Intishārāt-i Shī'ah'shināsī, 1385 [2006]).

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