

Chapter 10: The Residence of the Twelfth Imam

Dr. Fahimi: Where does the Imam of the Age live during the occultation?

Mr. Hoshyar: His residence is not established. Probably he does not have a fixed residence, and lives invisibly among the people, interacting with them. It is also possible that he may have selected a far away place for his domicile. In some hadith-reports it is stated that the twelfth Imam comes to Mecca during the pilgrimage season and participates in the hajj rituals. He sees and knows the people, whereas people do not see him¹.

Dr. Fahimi: I have heard that the Shi'is believe that the Imam disappeared in the city of Samarra, in that cellar which is ascribed to him and is a place of visitation (ziyarat). It is here, they say, that the Hidden Imam lives, and he will reappear also from this spot. If he is there in that cellar why cannot he be seen? Who brings food and drink for him? Why does he not go out from there? One of the Arab poets has composed a poem about this subject. He says:

Has not the time come for the cellar to bring out what you, out of your conjecture, believe to be a human being?

Shame on you, for creating a third fictitious being, other than a legendary bird and a ghost.

Mr. Hoshyar: This ascription is nothing more than a falsehood which has been circulated out of obstinacy. The Shi'is do not maintain such a belief. There is absolutely no report that says that the twelfth Imam lives in the cellar and will rise from there. No Shi'i scholar has mentioned such a thing. On the contrary, many hadith-reports narrate that he lives among the people and associates with them. Sadir Sayrafi has related a tradition from Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him) which says:

That which makes the condition of the Master of the Command (i.e., the twelfth Imam) resemble Joseph is that in spite of being mature and wise, and in spite of having associated with him before, Joseph's brothers could not recognize him when they came to him [in Egypt] until he introduced himself to them. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the distance that existed between Joseph and Jacob was no more than eighteen days, Jacob had no information about him. Then why are these people denying that God

can do a similar thing for His Proof, the Master of the Command? He too can interact with people, walk around their market place, sit on their carpets and still they would not recognize him! He would continue to do that until God permits him to introduce himself².

The Story about the Countries that Belong to the Sons of the Imam

Dr. Jalali: I have heard that the Imam of the Age has numerous sons, who live in large well developed countries whose capital cities are known by names such as Zahira, Rathiqa, Safiya, Zalum, and 'Anatis. Five of his well respected sons by the name of Tahir, Qasim, Ibrahim, 'Abd al-Rahman, and Hashim rule these countries. Some of the description of these countries includes their likeness to paradise where the climate is perfect and the blessings are countless. In these places there is such a total peace that a wolf and a sheep live together. Wild animals do not bother humans.

The inhabitants of these countries are the righteous followers of the Imam who have received their instruction from the Imam's school. Falsehood and deception have not found their way in these places. From time to time the Imam visits these ideal places. Such are the agreeable things reported about these countries that belong to the Imam's sons.

Mr. Hoshyar: The story of these unknown countries is undoubtedly a legend. The only source for it is the anecdotal account related in Hadiqat al-shi'a, Anwar nu'maniyya and Jannat al-ma'wa. In order to elucidate this we should look at the source of the anecdote. The story has been related in the following form:

It is related by 'Ali Fath Allah Kashani that Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Husyan 'Alawi has narrated in his book from Sa'id b. Ahmad who said: Hamza b. Musayyib narrated for me a story on the eighth day of Sha'ban, 544 AH (1149 CE), that 'Uthman b. 'Abd al-Baqi related on the seventh day of Jamadi al-Thani, 543 AH (1148 CE), who in turn related from Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Yahya Anbari on the tenth day of Ramadan, 543 AH (1148 CE) to me, saying: "I was with some people in the gathering of the vizier 'Awn al-Din Yahya b. Hubayra. In that gathering there was also a respectable person whose identity was not known. The person was engaged in relating the story in which he described one of his sea journeys. That year the ship lost its way and took them to the mysterious island about which no one knew anything. 'We had to disembark and we landed in that island."

At this point Ahmad b. Muhammad relates the fantastic story about those countries from this unknown narrator in great detail, and at the end of the story he appends the following:

After hearing the story the vizier entered his special chamber and asked all of us to come in. He then said: "No one has the right to transmit the story for anyone, as long as I am alive." We too, as long as the vizier was alive, never related the event for anyone³.

We have taken care to mention the source of the story so that the readers should realize the weakness

of the transmission and its unreliability. For the detail of the story you may refer to the book itself. It is obvious for the scholars that the existence of such countries cannot be proven on the basis of this narrative. First, the reporter of the important story is an unknown person whose identity is unclear. Hence, his report has no credibility. Second, it is not possible that such places exist when no one has any information about it.

This is particularly so in this age when all corners of the world have been mapped out and studied by the scholars. However, some people have defended the existence of these places as vehemently as if they were defending some fundamental Islamic principle. These people say that perhaps such places are present even now, but God has concealed them from strangers and non-believers! I do not believe that such opinions require any response. Actually, I do not understand what has prompted these people to offer such a whimsical and conjectural explanation of a story whose reliability and credibility is itself questionable!

It has been asserted that even if it is assumed hypothetically that such countries are non-existent now, one can still maintain that they did exist in the past and are now in ruins and their inhabitants extinct. Such an assertion is also baseless, because if such prosperous and large countries with Shi'i population had existed, there would have been many who would have known about them and would have related, however speculatively, the amazing things about them in history books.

Ordinarily, it is improbable that such major countries could have existed and no one ever recorded anything about them. It is equally implausible that such a thing would have been known to only one unidentified person whose report about these places forms the basis of this fantastic narrative. Moreover, it is unthinkable that the evidence about their existence would be so thoroughly wiped out that there would remain no archeological or historical trace of those places and their inhabitants!

The great scholar 'Allama Agha Buzurg Tihrani has critically evaluated the story and has doubted its reliability. In his comprehensive bibliographical study of books that were written by Muslim scholars about various Islamic subjects, he writes the following about the source that reports the incredible story about these prosperous countries that belong to the sons of the twelfth Imam:

This story appears at the end of one of the manuscripts of the book *Ta'azi*, written by Muhammad b. 'Ali 'Alawi. Hence, 'Ali b. Fath Allah Kashani assumed that the story is part of that book. He has certainly made an error since it is not possible that the story could be part of the book.

The reason is that Yahya b. Hubayra, the vizier in whose house the story took place, died in the year 560 AH (1164 CE), whereas the author of *Ta'azi* lived two centuries before that. In addition, there are inconsistencies in the text of the story because the narrator of the story, namely, Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Yahya Anbari, says: "The vizier exacted a promise from us that we would not relate the story to anyone. We too have fulfilled our promise and as long as he lived we did not disclose it."

In that case the narration of the story must be placed after 560 AH (1164 CE), that is, subsequent to the

vizier's death. On the other hand, 'Uthman b. 'Abd al-Baqi in the story says: "Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Yahya Anbari related the story to me in 543 AH (1148 CE)[4](#)."

In another place, says Agha Buzurg, the story relates: ". . . 'Uthman b. 'Abd al-Baqi related to me on the seventh of Jamadi al-Thani, 543 AH (1148 CE) that Ahmad b. Muhammad [Anbari] related to me on the tenth of Ramadan, 543 AH . . .!" Since the month of Ramadan falls two months after the month of Jamadi al-Thani how can it be possible for anyone to report in Jamadi Thani something that occurred in Ramadan?

In short, we are not religiously or rationally required to speculate and produce weak arguments to speak about the place of the twelfth Imam's residence and try to prove that Jaza'ir Khadra' (Evergreen Islands) or the city of Jabulqa or Jabursa are the places of his residence. Or declare that the Imam has chosen the Eighth Clime as his residence!

Dr. Fahimi: Then what is this story about the Jaza'ir Khadra'?

Mr. Hoshyar: Since it is getting late, shall we discuss the rest of the subject next week? If you all agree, we can meet in my house.

[Jazira Khadra' \(The Evergreen Island\)](#)

The session began on time at Mr. Hoshyar's residence.

Dr. Jalali: If I remember correctly Dr. Fahimi had a question regarding Jazira Khadra' in the previous meeting.

Dr. Fahimi: I have been told that the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him) and his sons live in Jazira Khadra'. What is your opinion about this belief?

Mr. Hoshyar: This story about Jazira Khadra' is no more than a legend. 'Allama Majlisi has narrated the entire story in his Bihar al-anwar, the summary of which is as follows. Majlisi says:

I found a manuscript in the Amir al-Mu'minin library of Najaf which was a treatise on the story of Jazira Khadra'. The author of this manuscript is Fadl b. Yahya Tayyibi. He has written that he heard the story of Jazira Khadra' from Shaykh Shams al-Din and Shaykh Jalal al-Din in the shrine of Imam Husayn [in Karbala] on the 15th night of Sha'ban, 699 AH (1299 CE). They related the story on the authority of Zayn al-Din 'Ali b. Fadil Mazandarani. Thus I decided to hear the story from him myself.

Fortunately, in the beginning of the month of Shawwal of the same year, it so happened that Shaykh Zayn al-Din travelled to the city of Hilla. I met with him in the house of Sayyid Fakhr al-Din. I asked him to tell me the story he had related for Shaykh Shams al-Din and Shaykh Jalal al-Din. He said:

I was engaged in studying with Shaykh 'Abd al-Rahim Hanafi and Shaykh Zayn al-Din 'Ali Andalusi in Damascus. Shaykh Zayn al-Din was a pious man, and held good opinion about the Shi'a and their scholars, and used to respect them. I stayed with him for a while and benefitted from his lectures. It so happened that he had to travel to Egypt. Since we liked each other, he decided to take me with him. We travelled together to Egypt and he chose to live in Cairo. We lived in the most favorable condition there for nine months. On one of the days he received a letter from his father, requesting him to return because he was seriously ill and wished to see him before his death.

The shaykh wept upon reading the letter and decided to travel to Andalusia. I also accompanied him in this journey. When we arrived in the first town of the peninsula, I became seriously ill and could not move at all. The shaykh became troubled over my condition. He entrusted me to the preacher of the town, asking him to take care of me and he continued on his journey to his city. My illness lasted for three days and gradually I started getting better. I came out of the house and strolled in the streets. There I saw some caravans that had come from the mountainous region with goods to sell. I engaged in conversation with them and they told me that they had come from the Berber region which is close to the islands of the Rafidis (Shi'is).

When I heard about the islands of the Rafidis I became eager to visit them. They told me that the distance between this town and the islands was twenty-five days of journey, of which for some two days there is no water or person to be found. To cross those two days I hired a donkey, and the rest of the journey I travelled on foot. I went on until I reached the islands of the Rafidis which were fortified with a strong wall and tall, sturdy watch towers. I entered the mosque of the city and it was a spacious mosque. I heard the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer in the way the Shi'is do, and following the call he prayed for the deliverance of the community through the immediate return of the Imam. I was crying with happiness.

The people started coming to the mosque and following the Shi'i practice they performed their ablutions and entered. A handsome man entered the mosque and went towards the mihrab (the niche). The congregational prayer began and after it was over they offered their supplications. Then they saw me and inquired about me. I told them my story and informed them that I was originally from Iraq. When they found out that I was a member of the Shi'a, they respected me and fixed me a place in one of the rooms in the mosque. The leader of the prayer showed his respect to me and never left me alone at any time.

On one of the days I asked him as to where the food and other needs of the people come from. He replied that their provision comes from Jazira Khadra', which is located in the middle of the White Sea. Twice every year their food comes by ship from the Jazira. I asked him about the time when the ship was due to return and he said that it would be in four months. I was sad to learn that it would take that long. However, after forty days seven ships anchored off shore. From the largest vessel a handsome looking person emerged. He came to the mosque and performed his ablutions in accordance with Shi'i teachings and offered his noon and afternoon prayers. After the prayers were over he came towards me,

greeted me -- mentioning my and my father's name.

I was surprised and said: "Did you learn my name during the journey from Damascus to Cairo or from Cairo to Andalusia?" He replied, "No. Rather, your name, and your father's name, as well as your features and characteristics have reached me. I will take you to Jazira Khadra' with myself." He sojourned there at the island for a week and after completing his work we set off. After some sixteen days had passed on the sea, my attention was drawn by the clear waters in the middle of the sea. That man whose name was Muhammad, asked me as to what had drawn my attention. I said that the waters of this region had a different color. At that he told me that this was the White Sea and that the Jazira Khadra' was there. "These waters are a life fortification surrounding us and protecting us in such a way that, by God's help, if the ships belonging to our enemies try to get closer to this point, through the blessing of the Imam of the Age, they are drowned."

I drank some of the water in that region. It was as sweet as the water of the Euphrates. After having crossed the white waters we arrived at the Jazira Khadra'. We disembarked from the ship and went to the city. The city was prosperous and full of fruit trees. It had a number of market places filled with goods and the inhabitants of the city lived most happily. My heart was filled with joy.

My friend Muhammad took me to his house. After we had rested for a while we went to the congregational mosque. Large crowds had gathered in the mosque. In the midst of all these people was a prominent and awe-inspiring person whose imposing features I cannot describe. His name was Sayyid Shams al-Din Muhammad. People were gathered around him studying the Arabic language, the Qur'an and other religious sciences. When I came into his presence he welcomed me and made me sit close to him. He enquired about my health and told me that it was he who had sent Shaykh Muhammad to fetch me. Then he ordered one of the rooms in the mosque to be prepared for my stay. I remained there and ate my meals with Sayyid Shams al-Din and his companions. Eighteen days passed in this way.

The first Friday that I was there I went to offer the special service of the jum'a. I saw Sayyid Shams al-Din reciting the two units of the Friday service as an obligatory act⁵. I was surprised to observe this and when everything was over I asked Sayyid Shams al-Din in private: "Is it now the period of the presence of the Imam that you offered the jum'a as an obligatory act?" He said: "No, the Imam is not present, but I am his special deputy." I went on to ask: "Have you ever seen the Imam of the Age?" He said: "No, I have not seen him, but my father used to say that he used to hear his voice but could not see him. But my grandfather would hear his voice and see him too." So I asked him: "O my master, what is the reason that some people can see him and some others do not." He said: "This a special favor that God grants to some of His creatures."

Then the Sayyid took me by the hand and we went out of the city. I saw lush trees, and fruit and flower gardens, the like of which I had not seen in Syria and Iraq. While we were strolling we met a handsome looking man who greeted us. I asked the Sayyid if he knew the man. He said: "Do you see this tall mountain?" I answered, "Yes." "In the middle of this mountain there is a beautiful home, with a sweet

water spring under the trees, and," he continued, "there is a dome made of bricks there. This man and his other companions are the servants of this dome and the court. Every Friday morning I go there and meet with the Imam of the Age. After saying two units of prayer I find the paper on which all the problems that I need a response for are written. It is appropriate that you too should go there and meet the Imam in that dome."

Hence, I began to walk towards the mountain. I found the dome as he had said, and saw the two servants I had seen before. I requested to see the Imam (peace be upon him). They said it was not possible and that they had no permission to admit anyone. So I said to them: "Pray for me." They agreed, and prayed for me. I descended the mountain and went to the house of Sayyid Shams al-Din. He was not at home.

I went to the house of Shaykh Muhammad with whom I had been on the boat, and related to him my experience on the mountain and told him that the two servants did not permit me to see the Imam. Shaykh Muhammad told me that no one except Sayyid Shams al-Din had permission to go to that place because he was one of the sons of the twelfth Imam. Between him and the Imam of the Age there was a distance of five generations of the Imam and that he was his special deputy.

After that I sought permission from Sayyid Shams al-Din to ask him about his rulings on some religious problems which I could then cite on his authority. I also asked him if I could read the Qur'an with him so that he could teach me the correct pronunciation. He agreed and told me that we should start with the Qur'an first. During my recitation I would mention the differences in the reading among the Qur'an reciters. The Sayyid told me that we do not recognize those variations, and added: "Our recitation is in conformity with the Qur'an of 'Ali b. Abi Talib (peace be upon him)."

At that point he told me the story of how the Qur'an was compiled by 'Ali b. Abi Talib. I asked him why some verses of the Qur'an had no connection with what was being said before and after. He agreed that the situation was as I described then related the story of how the Qur'an was compiled by Abu Bakr and how the caliphs rejected the compilation that was made by 'Ali b. Abi Talib. "It is for this reason that you see some verses not being related to those before or after," he said.

I asked the Sayyid's permission and reported from him some ninety rulings, which I cannot permit anyone to see except some very special individuals among the followers of the Imam . . .

At this juncture the narrator introduces another story which he had witnessed:

I asked the Sayyid about a tradition from the Imam of the Age that has been related to us that anyone who claims to have seen the Imam during the occultation is telling a falsehood. "How is this hadith compatible with what some of you are able to see?" He replied: "This is true. The Imam has said thus. However, it was said for that time when he had many enemies among the 'Abbasids and others. But at this time when the enemies have become disappointed and since our cities are distant from them where no body can get close to us, meeting the Imam does not pose any danger to him."

I then asked him if he knew about another tradition which is reported by the Shi'i scholars from the twelfth Imam regarding the khums -- that the Imam has made it lawful for the Shi'is. He replied: "The Imam has given the permission in regard to the khums to his Shi'a."

Then the narrator quotes some more rulings given by the Sayyid, who tells him: "Until now you too have seen the Imam twice without recognizing him." The story ends with his declaration: "The Sayyid imposed upon me the duty of not extending my stay in the Maghreb and of returning immediately to Iraq. And I obeyed his command⁶."

Mr. Hoshyar: The story of Jazira Khadra' is as I have narrated for you in brief. Let me hasten to add that this story has no credibility and that it resembles a legend and a fiction for the following reasons:

First, its chain of transmission (sanad) is unreliable. The story has been taken from an unidentified manuscript. 'Allama Majlisi himself says thus: "Since I have not found this story in any authentic book, I created a special section to report it [so that it does not get mixed up with the other reliable contents of Bihar al-anwar]."

Second, there are a number of inconsistencies in the narrative. I am sure you noticed that in one place Sayyid Shams al-Din tells the narrator that he was the deputy of the Imam, but he had not seen him. Moreover, he says: ". . . but my father used to say that he would hear his voice but could not see him. But my grandfather used to hear his voice and see him too." The same Sayyid later on says that he sees the Imam every Friday morning and encourages the narrator to do the same. The Shaykh who brought the narrator to that island also tells him that the Sayyid and those like him are the only ones who can meet with the Imam. As you have noticed this is a contradictory statement. The interesting part of the story is that if the Sayyid knew that he was the only one who could meet with the Imam, why did he propose to the narrator that he should go to the mountain and see the Imam?

Third, the story makes reference to alterations in the Qur'an, and such a view is impossible to maintain. Muslims scholars have unanimously rejected such a contention about the Holy Book of God.

Fourth, the lawfulness of the khums has been touched upon in the story, which, according to the jurists, is unacceptable.

At any rate, the story has been created like a fiction, and seems strange and far from the truth. A person by the name of Zayn al-Din leaves his home in Iraq for education in Syria. From there he accompanies his teacher to Egypt, and from Egypt to Andalusia in Spain. He travels all this distance, becomes ill, his teacher leaves him and after getting well he hears the name of the Jazira of the Rafidis. He becomes so desirous of visiting this place that he forgets his teacher and takes off until he reaches the island.

The island appears to be without any vegetation because he asks about the people's food and where it comes from. In response he hears that it comes from Jazira Khadra'. Although he is told that the next ship with food would arrive after four months, it arrives in forty days! After a week's sojourn he is taken to

sea. In the middle of the White Sea he observes clear, white waters . . . and finally arrives at Jazira Khadra'. Well, you know the rest of the story!

It is remarkable that a person from Iraq would travel all that distance through the different countries and would speak the languages of the people everywhere. Did the people in Spain also speak Arabic?

Another fantastic point is that part which deals with the White Sea. As you all know the White Sea is located in the northern part of Russia. The story as related takes place in a different region. Of course, the Mediterranean Sea, where the story takes place, is also known as the White Sea. However, the entire sea is called the White Sea, and not only a spot in it, as the narrator indicates.

Any person examining the story closely would realize that it is fabricated. In the final analysis, let me point out that we have previously noted that the hadith-reports mention that the Imam of the Age (peace be upon him) lives among the people and associates with them. He also participates in some important occasions, including the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, and helps people in trouble.

In the light of these traditions, to introduce a distant place, difficult to access and in the middle of the sea, as the Imam's domicile -- the Imam who is the hope of the downtrodden and the redresser of the wrongs committed against them, is, to say the least, unfair and unreasonable. Finally, let me apologize to you for taking your valuable time to analyze and discuss such an unreliable story.

Dr. Jalali: Does the Imam of the Age have any offspring or not?

Mr. Hoshyar: We do not have convincing proof supporting or rejecting the subject of the Imam's marriage and the existence of offspring for him. It is quite likely that he has been married and does have offspring without anyone knowing about it. He can do whatever is in his interest, which, in the view of some, might suggest that he already has offspring or that they will be born for him later⁷.

When Will He Appear?

Dr. Jalali: When is the promised Mahdi expected to appear?

Mr. Hoshyar: No time has been fixed for his appearance (zuhur). As a matter of fact, the Imams have regarded those who fix the time of the Mahdi's appearance as liars. Thus, for instance, Fudayl, a companion of Imam Baqir, asked the latter whether there was any specific time when the Mahdi would appear. The Imam in his response said three times: "Any one who fixes the time of the appearance is telling a falsehood⁸."

Another companion by the name of 'Abd al-Rahman b. Kathir was with Imam Sadiq when Mahzam Asadi came to visit the Imam and asked him: "When will the Qa'im from the family of the Prophet rise and establish the just government that you are expecting, for it has been delayed? When shall this be realized?" The Imam replied: "Those who fix the time of the appearance are certainly telling a lie. Those

who become hasty in this matter will definitely destroy themselves. Those who are patient will be delivered and will return to us."^[9]

A prominent and well trusted companion of Imam Sadiq by the name of Muhammad b. Muslim was told by the Imam: "Any one who fixes the time of the appearance for you -- do not hesitate to falsify him, because we do not fix the time for the appearance." There are ten other traditions on the same theme⁹.

These and many other traditions on this subject provide evidence that neither the Prophet nor any of the Imams ever fixed the time of the Mahdi's advent. Hence, if a tradition on this subject fixes the time and the tradition is attributed to the Imams and if the text is open to some exegetical explanation, then it should be explained. Otherwise, it should either be ignored or else falsified. An example of such an explanation of a weak and unreliable tradition is provided by the example of Abu Walid Makhzumi, who had attributed to the Imam a statement that said: "Our Qa'im will rise in ALR¹⁰."

The Signs of His Appearance

Engineer Madani: How reliable are the signs of the appearance of the Mahdi?

Mr. Hoshyar: There are numerous signs of the appearance of the Master of the Command (may God hasten deliverance through him!) mentioned in the books on hadith. We cannot undertake to discuss each one of them because we do not have that much time. It will require several sessions to cover even the most important of these. Nevertheless, some observations are in order, however brief.

(a) The hadith-reports coming from the ahl al-bayt have divided the signs of the appearance into two parts: first, those reports that mention the signs that will occur without any question and which are unconditional. These signs must occur prior to the appearance of the Mahdi. Second, those signs that are introduced without their being absolute occurrences. These are the events that are not in any way definitely the signs of the Imam's appearance; rather, they are conditional. If the conditions are fulfilled, so too will be the signs; and if the conditions are not fulfilled, so it is with the signs. It was because of some exigencies that they have been mentioned as part of the signs of the appearance.

(b) The signs of the appearance are those things without which the twelfth Imam will not appear. The fulfillment of each of these signs indicates that the days of restoration and deliverance are to some extent close by. However, this does not mean that after the signs are fulfilled, without any delay, the Imam will appear. In the case of some of these signs it is mentioned that proximate with their fulfillment, the Imam will appear.

(c) Some of the signs of the appearance will occur as a kind of miracle, so that the claim to Mahdiism is confirmed and the extraordinary situation of the world is conveyed to the people. The status of these signs is the same as with other miracles, which, even when they do go beyond the world of natural and normal phenomena, should not be regarded as unacceptable.

(d) There is a kind of sign that is mentioned in some books and which seems customarily improbable, such as the saying that when the Mahdi appears the sun will rise from the west, and that the solar eclipse will occur in the middle of the month of Ramadan, whereas the moon eclipse will occur towards the end of the same month. All rational people know that the occurrence of these signs means that the natural order will have fallen apart and that the solar system will have changed. It must be pointed out that the traditions that report such events at the End of Time are no more than 'single' (ahad) transmission.

In other words, they do not generate certainty as to the substance that is being reported. If anyone probes into their chain of transmission (sanad), he may quickly discover that these were fabricated and circulated during the Umayyad and the 'Abbasid periods under their patronage. That period in history saw many individuals who claimed to be the awaited Mahdi and challenging the de facto governments by rallying the support of the people against the unjust rulers. Since the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids understood that it was not possible to falsify the traditions about the Mahdi that were reported uninterruptedly for several generations, they used a trick on the people to discourage them from revolting under 'Alawid leadership.

Consequently, they fabricated and put into circulation traditions that carried impossible signs for the appearance of the Mahdi. In this way they sought to dissuade people from following the 'Alawids in their rebellion against the injustices of the ruling house. However, if these traditions are true, then there is nothing problematic in visualizing catastrophic events preceding the advent of the Mahdi to inform the people about the importance of the event, and to arouse in them a sense of urgency to work for the government of God on earth.

[The Story of Sufyani](#)

Engineer Madani: What is the sign about the appearance of Sufyani towards the End of Time when the Mahdi is to emerge?

Mr. Hoshyar: On the basis of numerous traditions it appears that before the rise of the Master of the Command, the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him), a man from the descendants of Abu Sufyan will rise. He has been described as an outwardly pious person who will take care to remember God at all times. But in reality he will be the most wicked person on earth.

He will deceive a large number of people and will rally them around himself. He will gain control over five regions: Damascus, Hims, Palestine, Jordan and Qinnasrin, and the 'Abbasid's power will be permanently destroyed by his hand. He will kill a large number of Shi'is. Then he will learn of the emergence of the Imam and he will dispatch an army to fight him. But the army will be unable to get close to him and will sink into the earth in the area between Mecca and Medina.

Dr. Jalali: As you know the 'Abbasid empire saw its downfall a long time ago. There is no trace of it left that Sufyani could destroy!

Mr. Hoshyar: In a hadith reported from Imam Musa Kazim (peace be upon him) he says: "The 'Abbasid dynasty is founded upon fraud and deception. It will also vanish in such a way that no trace of it will remain. However, it will revive itself again in such a way that it would seem as if it never saw that decline¹¹."

The apparent sense of this hadith suggests that 'Abbasid power will recur and that the final blow to it will be dealt by Sufyani. It is possible to maintain that although the rise of Sufyani could be regarded as one of the definite signs of the Imam's appearance, the manner and time of his emergence does not seem to be absolute. For example, it is possible that the destruction of 'Abbasid power at the hands of Sufyani may not be among the absolute signs of the appearance and it may take place at the hands of someone else.

Dr. Fahimi: I have heard that since Khalid b. Yazid b. Mu'awiya b. Abi Sufyan had the wish of gaining the caliphate which he saw in the hands of the Marwanids, he coined the tradition about the Sufyani to console himself and to boost the morale of the Umayyads. The author of the book Aghani says the following about Khalid: "He was learned and a poet. It is said that he fabricated the tradition about Sufyani¹²."

According to Tabari, the historian, 'Ali b. 'Abd Allah b. Khalid b. Yazid b. Mu'awiya arose in the year 159 AH/775 CE in Damascus saying that he was that awaited Sufyani. In this manner he used to call people to join his movement.[14] From this historical evidence it is clear that the tradition about Sufyani is among the fabricated hadith.

Mr. Hoshyar: The traditions about Sufyani have been reported by both the Sunni and the Shi'i scholars. It is likely that the tradition is among the uninterruptedly (mutawatir) transmitted ones. Hence, by the mere fact of the appearance of a false pretender one cannot rule the tradition to be fabricated and, hence, spurious. Rather, one should say that since the tradition about Sufyani was well known among the people, they were awaiting him. Some took advantage of this and revolted against the rulers claiming to be the awaited Sufyani, thereby deceiving their followers.

[The Story of Dajjal](#)

Dr. Jalali: The rise of Dajjal is regarded as one of the signs of the appearance of the Mahdi. He has been described in the traditions as a disbeliever who does not have more than one eye which is located on his forehead and shines like a star. On his forehead is written the following: "He is a disbeliever," which every person, literate or illiterate will be able to read. There will be an abundance of food and a river of water with him at all the times. He will ride a white donkey whose each step will span a mile. At his command the sky will rain and the earth will grow vegetation. The earth will be at his discretion. He will bring the dead back to life. He will cry out in a loud voice that will be heard all over the world saying: "I am your almighty god who created you and who sustains you. Run towards me!"

It is said that there was a person during the Prophet's time who was called 'Abd Allah or Sa'd b. Sayda. The Prophet and his companions went to visit him in his house. He claimed to be a god. 'Umar wanted to kill him but the Prophet restrained him. He is still living and at the End of Time will emerge from Isfahan in the village of Yahudiyya¹³.

It is reported from Tamim al-Dari, a Christian convert to Islam in the 9 AH/630 CE, who said: "I saw Dajjal in chains and fetters on one of the islands in the west¹⁴."

Mr. Hoshyar: In English, Dajjal is known as the 'Antichrist', that is the one 'against' or the 'enemy' of Christ. The name Dajjal is not a proper noun of an individual, In Arabic any impostor or a deceiver is called 'Dajjal'. In the Bible also the word 'dajjal' can be seen in the same sense. In the First Letter of John 2:22 it is written:

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son.

In another place in the same letter, 2: 18, it is written:

Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come, therefore we know that it is the last hour.

And in 4:3, it says:

And every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.

In the Second Letter of John, verse 7, it is written:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

From these references in the Bible it is evident that the word dajjal ('antichrist') is used in the meaning of a 'deceiver' and a 'liar.' Moreover, the story of the rise of the antichrist was well known among the Christians who awaited his rise.

It appears that Jesus (peace be upon him) had mentioned the emergence of the antichrist and had warned people about his sedition. Accordingly, Christians awaited him. In all probability, the antichrist mentioned by Jesus was the false messiah, a certain man named Dajjal, who appeared some five centuries following Jesus Christ and falsely claimed to be a prophet. It was he who was crucified and not Jesus, the Prophet. In Islam also there are a number of traditions about the existence of Dajjal. The Prophet used to warn people against the sedition of Dajjal, saying: "All the Prophets who came after Noah used to warn their community about the sedition of Dajjal¹⁵."

The Prophet is reported to have said: "The Day of Judgement will not take place until thirty Dajjals

emerge claiming to be a prophet¹⁶."

'Ali b. Abi Talib said: "Be afraid of the two Dajjals who will be born of the descendants of Fatima. A Dajjal ('imposter') will arise from Dijla at Basra who is not from me. He will be the forerunner of a number of Dajjals ('deceivers')¹⁷."

In another tradition the Prophet said: "The Day of Judgement will not commence until thirty liars and Dajjal-like persons appear and ascribe falsehood to God and His Prophet¹⁸."

In still another tradition the Prophet is reported to have said: "Before the rise of Dajjal, more than seventy Dajjals ('impostors') will precede¹⁹."

From all these traditions it appears that 'Dajjal' is not the name of a specific person. Like the word 'antichrist' it is generally applied to any deceiver, imposter, and fraudulent person. In short, the roots of the story of Dajjal must be searched in the Bible and among the Christians. Thereafter, most of the hadith-reports on the subject, with all of their details, are to be found in the Sunni books and were transmitted by their narrators. It is quite possible that the actual events concerning Dajjal, as foretold in some traditions, might be true. However, all the details about his features and character do not have the stamp of authenticity on them, since the majority of these descriptions, published in Bihar al-anwar and other books, are reported by unidentified narrators²⁰.

Consequently, even if it is hypothetically admitted that the actual instance of the appearance of Dajjal is authentic, the details that are provided have certainly been colored by fictitious stories. We can maintain this much without difficulty: that in the Last Days and close to the emergence of the twelfth Imam, a man will be found who will be singularly a deceiver and an imposter, surpassing in wickedness all the previous Dajjals. He will mislead a group by his nihilistic claims. He will present himself to the people as if he is in control of their bread and water. People will become so delinquent in moral discernment that they will begin to believe that the entire universe is within his control. In his deceitful communication he will introduce good works as bad and bad as good. He will show hellfire as paradise, and paradise as hellfire. But his disbelief will be evident to all literate and illiterate persons.

However, there is no evidence to regard Sa'id b. Sayd as the promised Dajjal or to believe that he continues to live since the time of the Prophet. For, apart from the weakness in the chain of transmission, the Prophet is reported to have said this about Dajjal: "He will not enter the two cities of Mecca and Medina." On the contrary Sa'id b. Sayd had entered these cities. He died in Medina and some people were witness to his death²¹.

If it is hypothetically accepted that the Prophet did name Sa'id as Dajjal, he must have used the word in its common meaning as a 'deceiver' and a 'liar' rather than as the Dajjal who is part of the signs of the appearance of the Mahdi. In other words, when the Prophet met Sa'id he introduced him as a personification of an antichrist to his companions. Following that, when he informed the people about the emergence of Dajjal in the Final Days, those who heard him thought the reference was being made to

Sa'id b. Sayd whom he had called a Dajjal, and it is this Dajjal who would appear as one of the signs of the Last Days, akhir al-zaman. The tradition about Dajjal being alive and possessing a long age comes from this incident.

- [1.](#) Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 152
- [2.](#) Ibid., p. 154
- [3.](#) al-Anwar al-nu'maniyya (Tabriz edition), Vol. 2, p. 57
- [4.](#) Tihrani, al-Dhari'ah ila tasanif al-shi'a, Vol. 5, p. 108
- [5.](#) As a rule, during the absence of the twelfth Imam, since there is no directly appointed deputy of the Imam, the Friday service is offered as a recommended act, which is immediately followed by the noon prayer as the obligatory act. In this case Sayyid Shams al-Din, as the deputy of the twelfth Imam, in the context of this narrative offers the Friday service as an obligatory act. Tr
- [6.](#) Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 159-174
- [7.](#) This is the point of the prayer mentioned in the Mafatih al-jinan in which a believer prays to God: "O God, give him (i.e., the twelfth Imam), his family, his children, his descendants, his community and his subjects in their entirety, that which is pleasing in his eye." Also, in another supplication, received from the twelfth Imam himself, he says: "O God, grant him in himself, in his descendants, his followers, his subjects, his associates, his general supporters, his enemies, and all the inhabitants of the world that which will be pleasing in his eye." However, it is important to keep in mind that such prayers can not serve as hard core evidence to prove that the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him) has offspring. At the same time, one cannot rule out altogether that he does not have any offspring. Imam Sadiq has related a tradition in which he says: "As if I am seeing the Qa'im descending in the mosque of Kufa with his relatives and his family." See Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 317
- [8.](#) Ibid., Vol. 52, p. 103
- [9.](#) Ibid., Vol. 52, pp. 104 and 117
- [10.](#) Ibid., Vol. 52, p. 106.
- [11.](#) Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 250
- [12.](#) Abu al-Faraj Isfahani, al-Aghani, Vol. 16, p. 171
- [13.](#) Ta'rikh Tabari, Vol. 7, p. 25
- [14.](#) Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 193-197; Muslim, Sahih, Vol. 18, p. 46 to 87; Abu Dawud, Sunan, Vol. 2, p. 212.
- [15.](#) Muslim, Sahih, Vol. 18, p. 79; Abu Dawud, Sunan, Vol 3, p. 214
- [16.](#) Muslim, Sahih, Vol. 18, p. 79; Abu Dawud, Sunan, Vol 3, p. 214.
- [17.](#) Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 197.
- [18.](#) Abu Dawud, Sunan, Vol 2, p
- [19.](#) Majma' al-zawa'id, Vol 7, p. 333
- [20.](#) For the detailed chain of transmission and the problem of unknown reporters in that chain see: Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52 where the traditions are reported with full documentation made up of some unidentified narrators
- [21.](#) Bihar al-anwar, Vol. 52, p. 199

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