

Chapter 4: Pioneering Role Of The Shi'ah In Theology

[Section One: The First to Write about Theology](#)

The *tabi'i* follower of the Imamiyah, Isa ibn Rawdah who wrote about the imamate is the first person to compile a work in this field. He lived till the days of Abu Jafar al-Mansur with whom he had special relation for he was a client of the Banu Hashim clan. Ibn Rawdah opened up and explored this branch of knowledge. Ahmad ibn Abi Tahir who refers to Ibn Rawdah's book in *Tarikh Baghdad* declares that he himself had seen it, as recorded in the *Fihrist* of al-Najashi. Then comes Abu Hashim ibn Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) who wrote a number of books on theology. He was one of the eminent figures of the Shi'ah and he consolidated the science of theology. When he was about to die he handed over his books to Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Abdillah ibn Abbas al-Hashimi, a *tabi'i* so that the Shi'ah turned to him. This is stated in *Al-Ma'arif* of Ibn Qutaybah. These two preceded Abu Hadhayfah Wasil ibn Ata, the Mutazilite, whom al-Suyuti described as the pioneer in theology.

[Section Two: The First Followers of the Imams to Debate about Shi'ism](#)

Abu Uthman al-Jahidh says: "The first person to debate about Shi'ism was al-Kumayt ibn Zayd, the poet. He established arguments for it, and, had it not been for his efforts they would not have known how to argue for it." On this point I would contend that Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, the Companion (may Allah be pleased with him) had preceded al-Kumayt. Abu Dharr stayed in Damascus for some time propagating Ali's doctrines and Shi'i ideas. Some people accepted his ideas in Syria. He then left for the villages of Sarfand and Mis which are part of Jabal Amil and were under Syrian administration. He invited their inhabitants to Shi'ism and they accepted it. In *Amal al-Amil* it is stated that when Abu Dharr was exiled to Syria after spending some days there a large number of people embraced Shi'ism. So Muawiyah banished him to the villages. He set foot on Jabal Amil where the people embraced Shi'ism on the first

day.

Abu al-Faraj ibn al-Nadim says in *Al-Fihrist* that the first person to argue for the Imamiyyah school of thought is Ali ibn Ismail ibn Maytham al-Tammar, may Allah be pleased with him, and he was among Imam Ali's most distinguished companions. Al-Tammar's books include *Kitab al-Imamah* and *Kitab al-Istihqaq*.”

It is noteworthy here that Isa ibn Rawdah preceded Ali ibn Ismail by a considerable period of time and al-Kumayt by a much longer one. Al-Kumayt was contemporary with Hisham ibn al-Hakam and was staying in Baghdad also. He had had theological debates on imamate with Abu al-Huzayl and he also engaged Dirar ibn Amr al-Dabiy and Nadir al-Nidzam and emerged triumphant in different occasions as mentioned by al-Murtada in *Al-Fusul al-Mukhtarah*.

Therefore, al-Kumayt was one of the Shi'ah masters of theology and not the first theologian to discuss imamate. Indeed, Abu Dharr, together with twelve others enjoyed a pioneering position. They were Khalid ibn Sa'id ibn al-As, Salman al-Farisi, al-Miqdad ibn al-Aswad al-Kindi, Buraydah al-Aslami, Ammar ibn Yasir, Ubay ibn Ka'b, Khuzaymah ibn Thabit, Abu al-Haytham ibn al-Tayhan, Sahl ibn Hunayf and Abu Ayub al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with them). This has been related in the hadith on disputation (*ihtijaj*) in Al-Tabrasi's *Al-Ihtijaj*.

Section Three: Famous Authorities on Theology among the Shi'ah

We have mentioned them in classes in the original version of this book. They are as follows: Kumayl ibn Ziyad of Kufa who was trained by the Commander of the Faithful ('a) and learnt various disciplines. Kumayl was informed by the latter that al-Hajjaj (ibn Yusuf) would murder him and he was actually killed by al-Hajjaj in Kufa around the year 83 A. H.

Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilali, a *tabi'i*. Al-Hajjaj pursued him vigorously but failed to get him. Sulaym died in the days of the former. We have already mentioned that he was one of the closest companions of Ali ('a).

Al-Harith al-A'war al-Hamadani who was skilful in disputations about the fundamentals of the faith, learnt from the Commander of the Faithful ('a) and trained by him. He died in 65 A. H. We have introduced his biography at length in the original version of this book. Lastly, comes Jabir ibn Yazid ibn al-Harith al-Jufi (Abu Abdillah) al-Kufi. He was trained by al-Baqir ('a) and was well-versed in the fundamentals and other religious sciences.

After those luminaries comes another category.

Qays al-Masir was one of the outstanding scholars of theology in his time to whom students travelled

from all quarters. He was trained in theology under Imam Zayn al-Abidin (Ali ibn al-Husayn). Imam al-Sadiq who attested to his proficiency in it observed: "You and al-Ahwal are energetic and proficient." Al-Ahwal was Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Numan ibn Abi Tarifah al-Bajali. He learnt from Imam Zayn al-Abidin ('a) and compiled *Kitab If'al la Taf'al* (dos and don'ts), *Kitab al-Ihtijaj fi Imamah Amir al-Muminin alayh al-salam* (On disputations concerning the leadership of Imam Ali ('a), *Kitab al-Kalam ala al-Khawarij* (Observations about the Kharijites), *Kitab al-Marifah*, *Kitab al-Rad ala al-Mutazilah* (Refutation of Mu'tazilism) and a book on his disputation sessions with Abu Hanifah and the Murji'ites.

Hamran ibn A'yan, Zurarah ibn Ayan's brother who studied theology from Imam Zayn al-Abidin ('a). Hisham ibn Salim, one of the chiefs of the Shi'ah in theology. Yunus ibn Yaquub who was proficient in theology to whom Imam Abu Abdillah al-Sadiq once said "Conduct your theological debates according to transmitted traditions (*athar*) and you will always be successful."

Faddal ibn al-Hasan ibn Faddal al-Kufi, the famous theologian. Never did he engage in debate with an opponent without silencing him. Sayyid Murtada has reported some of his disputations in *Al-Fusul al-Mukhtarah*.

All the aforementioned luminaries were contemporaries who died during the second century.

The following are other theologians of the same category:

Hisham ibn al-Hakam about whom Imam al-Sadiq says: "This man supported us with his heart, tongue and hand." He engaged in theological argumentation with members of all sects and silenced them. He had many disputation sessions with his opponents and wrote on theology. His vigorous and confident way of disputation and high social position made people envy him and attribute invalid utterances to him whereas he was indeed innocent of all corruption of word or deed. I have enumerated his works in the original version of this book. Hisham died in 179 A. H.

Al-Sakkak, Muhammad ibn Khalil Abu Ja'far al-Baghdadi, a companion and disciple of Hisham ibn al-Hakam. He studied theology under the latter and wrote a number of books on it which we have mentioned in our unabridged version of this book. Abu Malik al-Dahhak al-Hadrami, an authority on theology and a distinguished Shi'ite figure who was contemporary with al-Sadiq and al-Kazim ('a).

Among them were the family of Nubakht. In *Al-Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadim says "The family of Nuwbakht are known for their loyalty to Ali and his descendants." It is reported in *Riyad al-Ulama* that the Nawbakhtis were a well-known group among the Shi'ah theologians. Nawbakht himself was a Persian who was learned in the sciences of the predecessors. When he grew too frail to continue in the company of al-Mansur, his son, Abu Sahl replaced him. The latter fathered al-Fadl ibn Abi Sahl ibn Nawbakht who took the lead in learning and culture.

Some eminent personalities among our companions had this to say about him: "He was the philosopher

and theologian who was steeped in divine wisdom and an authority on ancient sciences. He translated from Persian to Arabic many works of illuminationist philosophy written by the Pahlavi predecessors. He also wrote about the types of wisdom (philosophy), and *Kitab fi al-Hikmah* (A Book on Wisdom). He had a large work on the Imamate, *Kitab fi al-Imamah*. In compliance with the wish of his contemporaries, he compiled a book on the branches of astronomy. Al-Fadl was among the scholars who lived during the time of Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid caliph. He headed al-Rashid's library (*Khizanat al-Hikmah*). Some of his descendants were distinguished scholars.

Al-Qatfi says in his *Akhbar al-Hukama* (Stories of the philosophers): "Al-Fadl ibn Nawbakht Abu Sahl al-Farisi was a famous master of the theologians. He has been mentioned in their books and all those who mentioned him also talked about his lineage. Among them were Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn al-Nadim and Abu Abdullah al-Marzabani. He lived during the time of Harun al-Rashid who charged him to run the library housing the books of wisdom".

Among his sons who excelled in learning is Ishaq ibn Abi Sahl ibn Nawbakht who was trained by his father in the intellectual sciences and other sciences of the predecessors. Ishaq succeeded his father at al-Rashid's library. He was also blessed with profoundly knowledgeable sons who attained eminence in theology, like Abu Ishaq Ismail ibn Ishaq ibn Sahl ibn Nawbakht, the author of *Al-Yaqut fi Ilm al-Kalam*. This book was commented on by Allamah ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli who notes in its beginning: "It has been written by our master and great leader Abu Ishaq ibn Nawbakht."

The author of *Riyad al-Ulama* says: "Ibn Nawbakht, the renowned theologian who was among the earliest followers of the Imams and author of *Al-Yaqut fi Ilm al-Kalam...*". In another place he says: "Isma'il ibn Nawbakht was contemporary with Abu Nawas the poet." His two brothers Yaqub and Ali the sons of Ishaq ibn Abi Sahl ibn Nawbakht were among the notable members of the Nawbakht family and great scholars of theology and astronomy. After Ali ibn Ishaq came other prominent scholars such as Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Ishaq who was a notable theologian and an honorable man. He has been mentioned by Ibn al-Nadim among Shi'ah theologians. Another is Abu Sahl, Ismail ibn Ali ibn Ishaq whom Al-Najashi describes as the chief of the theologians among the Shi'ah of Baghdad and the foremost Nawbakhti of his time.

Ibn al-Nadim says, "He was one of the eminent Shi'ah, an honorable figure, a man of excellence, a scholar and a theologian. He used to conduct sessions which were attended by a group of theologians. He was maternal uncle to al-Hasan ibn Musa Abu Muhammad al-Nawbakhti, the famous theologian. Ibn al-Nadim writes: "(He was) a theologian and a philosopher. Al-Najashi describes him as the master of theologians who surpassed his peers during his time, before and after the third century."

These people have compiled works on theology, philosophy and other fields. I have enumerated them in the original version of this book along with a large number of the Nawbakhtis. No writer has ever written on the Nawbakhti as I have. The following are some of the earlier theologians of this category:

Abu Muhammad al-Hajjal. Al-Fadl ibn Shadhan reports: "He was a theologian from among our companions, a perfect speaker and a most skilled in logical argument."

Another scholar in this category is Abdurahman ibn Ahmad ibn Jabrawayh, Abu Muhammad al-Askari. A summary of al-Najashi's report about him reads: "(He is) an eloquent theologian and a good writer who is known for his excellent manners. He engaged in disputation with Abbad ibn Sulayman and his peers. Among his good works that has come down to us is *Al-Kamil fi al-Imamah*."

Muhammad ibn Abi Ishaq a prominent theologian: Ibn Batta has mentioned him in his *Fihrist*, ascribing to him a number of works. He lived in the time of Imam al-Ridha' and al-Mam'un. Al-Barqi narrates on his authority.

Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Mumallik al-Isfahani (Abu Abdullah), an eminent personality among our companions. He was a Mutazalite but later Shi'ism under the influence of the aforementioned Abdurrahman ibn Ahmad ibn Jabruwayh. He had some works which I mentioned in the original version of this book. He was contemporary with al-Jubba'i whose book he refuted.

Ibrahim ibn Sulayman ibn Abi Daja Abu Ishaq al-Basri. He was very famous for his competence in jurisprudence, theology, literature and poetry. Al-Jahidh narrates from him and gives his account in his books.

Sheikh al-Fadl ibn Shadhan al-Nishapuri is also among the Shi'i master theologians who combined all the branches of religious knowledge. He wrote a hundred and eighty books. He was a disciple of al-Ridha' ('a) who lived till the days of al-Askari ('a) and died after the birth of 'the Proof', Imam Mahdi the son of al-Hasan ('a).

Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Wasif al-Nashi al-Saghir: Ibn al-Nadim mentions him as one of the Shi'ah theologians, ascribing to him a book on Imamate. In *Fawat al-Wafayat*, Ibn Kathir reports that "he was a proficient theologian and a prominent Shi'ah." This notable scholar studied theology at the hands of Abu Sahl Ismail ibn Ali ibn Nawbakht. His name falls in the categories of leading lexicologists, poets and theologians alike. He was from Baghdad and lived in the district of Bab al-Taqq. As recorded in *Ma'alim al-Ulama* this man died a martyr. He was killed and then his body was burnt. Ibn Khillikan observes in *Al-Wafayat* that al-Mutanabbi used to attend the classes of Ali ibn Wasif and write down all what he said. This indicates the high rank of Ibn Wasif .

Al-Fadl ibn Abdurahman al-Baghdadi a skilful theologian who wrote *Kitab al-Imamah*, a fine and voluminous book. Abu Abdillah al-Hasan ibn Ubaydullah al-Ghada'iri possessed a copy of it.

Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Ali al-Khazzaz, a resident of Ray who was a great theologian. He wrote a number of books on theology and was also at home with jurisprudence. He wrote *Kifayat al-Athar fi al-Nusus ala al-A'immat al-Ithna Ashar*. He was also called Abu al-Qasim and Abu al-Hasan. He died in Ray in the times of Ibn Babawayh al-Saduq who transmitted (some material of) *Kifayat al-Athar* on his authority.

Ibn Qubbah Abu Jafar al-Razi Muhammad ibn Abdurrahman. Ibn al-Nadim says: “(He was) among the Shi’ah theologians and very brilliant” and listed his books. Al-Najashi and other scholars of *rijal* have mentioned him. Ibn Qubbah falls in the same category as that of Sheikh al-Mufid and Sheikh al-Saduq.

Among them was al-Susanjardi, Muhammad ibn Bishr al-Hamduni from the people of Hamdun and his agnomen was Abu al-Hasan. He was among the notable and righteous personalities of our companions; he went on pilgrimage fifty times, each time on foot. He wrote on theology and lived till the time of Abu Jafar ibn Qubbah and Abu al-Qasim al-Balkhi and a number of their peers. He wrote *Kitab al-Muqni fi al-Imamah*.

Ali ibn Ahmad al-Kufi whom Ibn al-Nadim counts among the famous and accomplished theologians of the Imamiyyah sect ascribing to him *Kitab al-Awsiya*¹. I have presented in the original version of this book, a detailed biography of him along with a bibliography of his works on various branches of knowledge. He died in 352 A. H.

Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Balwi from the tribe of Bali in Egypt. Ibn al-Nadim counts him among the Shi’i theologians and adds that he was a preacher, a jurist and a scholar. He also enumerates his works.

Al-Ja’fari Abdurrahman ibn Muhammad, one of the masters of the Shi’ah theologians. Ibn al-Nadim mentioned him among theologians of the Shi’ah and mentions that he wrote *Kitab al-Imamah* and *Kitab al-Fada’il*.

The following is another category:

Abu Nasr al-Farabi, the first philosopher in Islam is named ‘Teacher’ (*mu’allim*) sharing this title with the ‘First Teacher’ (Aristotle). In the original version of this book, I have given a good account of his biography along with a bibliography of his works. He died in the year 339.

Abu Bishr, Ahmad ibn Ibrahim ibn Ahmad al-Qummi. Ibn al-Nadim counts him among the Shi’ah theologians who were both jurists and scholars of theology. He was a student of al-Jaludi. He wrote on both fields. Among his works are *Kitab Mihan al-Anbiya wa al-Awsiya wa al-Awliya* which discusses the tribulations endured by the prophets, the legates, *awsiya*, and the saints. He died in 350.

Another is Zahir, who was also an authority on theology. Ibn al-Nadim and other writers of indices (*faharis*) considered him among the Shi’ah theologians and commended him. He was a servant of Abi al-Jaysh al-Muzaffar ibn al-Khurasani who lived in the third century. Sheikh al-Mufid was one of his students.

Al-Nashi al-Saghir Ali ibn Wasif was famous for his competence in theology. Ibn al-Nadim counts him among the Shi’i theologians. He is one of the excellent poets who praised the Ahl al-Bayt. There is a detailed account of his biography in the original version of this book.

Abu al-Saqr al-Mawsili, a theologian of the Imamiyyah sect. When Ali ibn Isa al-Rummani entered

Baghdad, al-Mausili engaged him in theological debates and defeated him. Our master, Ibn al-Mu'allim relates in his *Kitab al-Uyun wa al-Mahasin* the latter's disputation sessions which he witnessed.

Another is the chief of the Shi'ah and reviver of Islamic law, our master Sheikh al-Mufid, Abu Abdillah Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Na'mani, known as Ibn al-Mu'allim. Ibn al-Nadim says: "He became the leader of Shi'ah theologians. He surpasses all in the art of theological polemics according to the school of his companions. He was very clever and quick-witted. I have witnessed his proficiency. He has a number of works to his credit." Sheikh al-Mufid had a good mastery over all branches of Islamic learning that flourished during his time. He was born in 338 and he passed away in 409.

Abu Ya'li al-Ja'fari, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Hamza, the able successor to Sheikh al-Mufid: He was both a jurist and a theologian and rightly regarded as an authority on the two disciplines together. He died in 463.

Abu Ali Ibn Sina, the head of the peripatetic philosophers. His position in learning is too well-known to warrant any introduction. In his *Tabaqat* (classes of authors) written in Persian, Al-Qadi al-Mar'ashi attempted, in a lengthy discussion, to prove that Ibn Sina was a Shi'ah but I cannot confirm it. No doubt, he was born with Shi'ah disposition for his father was an Isma'ili Shi'ah. He died in 428 at the age of fifty-eight.

Sheikh Abu Ali ibn Miskawayh who hailed from Ray but lived, died and was buried in Isfahan. He had a good mastery of all the sciences and wrote on all branches of learning. I have mentioned him in the original version of this book along with a list of his works. He joined the company of al-Mahlabi al-Wazir, then Adud al-Dawlah ibn Buwayh, then Ibn al-'Amid and lastly associated himself with the latter's son. All these people were Shi'ah. A number of scholars including Mir Muhammad Baqir al-Damad, al-Qadi, in his *Al-Tabaqat*, and Sayyid al-Khwunsari, in *Al-Rawdah*, attested to his being a Shi'ah. He passed away in 431. His grave is in Khajoo district of Isfahan.

Sayyid al-Sharif al-Murtada 'Alam al-Huda (the Sign of Guidance). His theological works are referred to as authoritative. He became the chief of the Shi'ah. Hardly was anyone gifted with his vast knowledge and the ability to do research in all Islamic sciences. I have presented his biography as well as a list of his works in the original version of this book. He was born in the month of Rajab in 355 and passed away in Rabi al-Awwal in 436. Among the servants of Sayyid al-Murtada was Dhubi ibn A'yun, the great scholar and theologian. He compiled a book on theology in twelve volumes which is titled *Uyun al-Adillah*. It is the largest of its kind.

Sheikh Allamah Abu al-Fath al-Karajiki. He was a master of the theologians, skilful in the various parts of philosophy and unique in jurisprudence and hadith. He compiled, on all disciplines, both comprehensive works and summaries. I have enumerated all his works in the original version of this book and wrote about his masters in my *Bughyat al-Wu'at fi Tabaqat Mashayik al-Ijazat*. He died in 449 A. H.

Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Ali ibn al-Farisi al-Nishapuri, an outstanding theologian, a jurist, a scholar and a pious ascetic. He was killed by Abu al-Mahasin Abdurrazzaq, the ruler of Nishapur. He authored a number of famous works including *Rawdat al-Wa'izin*. He met Sayyid al-Murtada and attended his lessons when his (Ibn al-Farisi's) father was studying under the former.

Here is another category:

Sheikh Ali ibn Sulayman al-Bahrani leader of philosophers and learned men, author of *Al-Isharat fi al-Kalam* on which his student the saintly scholar Sheikh Maitham al-Bahrani has commented. Sheikh Ali also wrote *Risalah fi al-Ilm* on which Nasir al-Din al-Tusi wrote a commentary.

Sadid al-Din ibn Azizah Salim ibn Mahfuz ibn Azizah al-Hilli. He became the foremost scholar on theology, philosophy and the ancient sciences. He trained Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, the author of *Al-Sharayi'*, Sadid al-Din ibn al-Mutahhar and another group of eminent scholars. He wrote *Al-Minhaj fi Ilm al-Kalam* which served as the authority in theology.

Sheikh Kamal al-Din Maytham ibn Ali ibn Maytham al-Bahrani: The excellence he attained in all Islamic sciences including philosophy, theology and gnostic secrets led everyone to believe that he took the lead in all disciplines. I have recorded in the original version of this book how notable scholars attest to his great learning. Among his works are *Kitab al-Mi'raj al-Samawi* and *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah* (a commentary on Imam Ali's *Nahj al-Balaghah*) in three levels; large, medium and short. In this work the author presented such qualitative studies that testify to his erudition in all branches of learning.

He also wrote a commentary based on the principle of theosophy employed in *Kitab al-Isharat*, a book written by the aforementioned al-Bahrani, his teacher. Others are *Kitab al-Qawa'id fi Ilm al-Kalam* which he finished in the month of Rabi al-Awwal 676, *Kitab al-Bahr al-Khidamm*, *Risalah fi al-Wahy wa al-Ilham* (a book on revelation and inspiration), *Sharh al-Mi'ah Kalimah* (a book on a hundred maxims) that is compiled by al-Jahidh from the short sayings of the Commander of the Faithful. He also wrote *Kitab al-Najat fi al-Qiyamah fi Amr al-Imamah* (on leadership after the Holy prophet), *Kitab Istiqsa al-Nazar fi-Imamat al-A'immat al-Ithna Ashar* (on the leadership or *imamah* of the twelve Imams) and *Risalah fi Adab al-Bahth*. He died in 679 in the village of Halnan in the al-Makhuz district of Bahrain.

Nasir al-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, the master of philosophers and theologians and the defender of the creed and the religion. There is a detailed account of his biography in the original version of this book coupled with a bibliography of his works on both the intellectual sciences and Islamic law according to the Imamiyyah school and a list of the scholars he trained. He was born in 597 and died in Baghdad. His grave is situated in one of the porticos of the mausoleum of Kazimiyyah, peace and greetings be on those who have ennobled it.

Allamah Jamal al-Din ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hilli, the chief of the Shi'ah who is known as Ayatullah and *Allamah ala al-itlaq* (scholar in all respects), a title which he deserved well. He was actually an ocean of knowledge, a truly great researcher and without doubt the master of everyone in everything. His works

number more than four hundred. I counted the books he wrote on philosophy and theology alone and got forty. All in all, I counted more than ninety. I presented a list of his extant works in the original version of this book. He passed away in the last half of Friday night, the 21st of Muharram, 726 A. H. at the age of seventy-eight. His grave is situated in the golden estrade in the courtyard of Imam Ali's mausoleum.

Sharif Jamal al-Din al-Nishapuri, Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Husayni, a resident of Aleppo was also a master in theology. Ibn Hajar mentioned him in *Al-Durar al-Kaminah fi A'yan al-Mi'ah al-Thaminah* (Hidden jewels of the eighth century). He says, "He was very proficient in the principles of jurisprudence and the Arabic language. He studied at Al-Asadiyyah in Aleppo and was one of the masters of intellectual sciences. He was handsome during his youth. He was a Shi'ah. He died in the year 776. This was quoted from al-Suyuti's *Bughyat al-Wu'at*.

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