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Lesson 20: The Shi'ah-Populated Places during the Second Century Hijri

At the beginning of the second century AH, Shi'ism extended beyond the frontiers of the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq as it encompassed the entire Muslim domain. In view of the scattering of the Shi'ah and 'Alawis in the Muslim territories, this matter can be discerned. From the time of Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, the migration of the Shi'ah and 'Alawis to the other regions had begun.

These migrations were further expedited during the second century AH with the beginning of the propaganda and movements by the 'Alawis. After the failure of the uprising of Zayd in Kufah, his son Yahya along with a number of his supporters went to Khurasan.¹ After him, the uprising of 'Abd Allah ibn Mu'awiyah, a descendant of Ja'far ibn Abi Talib at-Tayyar, covered the regions such as Hamedan, Qum, Rey, Qirmis, Isfahan, and Fars, and 'Abd Allah himself lived in Isfahan.

Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani says, "The notables of Banu Hashim went to him and he designated each of them to rule over a district. Even Mansur and Safah (who later became the first two 'Abbasid caliphs) had connivance with him and this continued till the time of Marwan Himar and the emergence of Abu Muslim."²

During the 'Abbasid period, the 'Alawi movements always emerged, one definite consequence of which was the scattering of the 'Alawis in the different regions. For example, after the uprising of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah during the reign of Mansur and his defeat, the descendants of Imam al-Hasan ('a) were scattered in the different places. In this regard, Mas'udi thus says:

The brothers of Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah (Nafs az-Zakiyyah) were scattered in the different places. His son, 'Ali ibn Muhammad, went to Egypt where he was killed later. His other son, 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad, went to Khurasan and from there proceeded to Sind where he was killed. His third son, Hasan ibn Muhammad went to Yemen where he was put behind bars and passed away while in prison. His (Nafs az-Zakiyyah's) brother, Musa, went to Mesopotamia.

Another brother of Nafs az-Zakiyyah, Yahya, went to Rey and from there he proceeded to Tabaristan. Another brother of his, Idris, went to Maghrib. Yet another brother, Ibrahim, went to Basrah where he formed an army composed of men from Ahwaz, Fars among other cities, but his uprising ended in failure.³

Although most of them were pursued by the 'Abbasid agents and were unable to remain in one place and were later killed, their impact remained. Sometimes, their children lived in those places. For example, 'Abd Allah, son of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah, as narrated by Mas'udi, was not able to remain in Khurasan and thus, he went to Sind.⁴ Yet, the author of the book, *Muntaqilah at-Talibiyyin*, narrates that the son of 'Abd Allah, Ibrahim, remained in Khurasan and had two sons named Qasim and Muhammad.⁵

Similarly, there was a group in Transoxiana which was tracing itself back to Ibrahim ibn Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah.⁶

Now, we shall survey the condition of the cities and regions in which the Shi'ah lived in large number during the second century AH.

a. Khurasan

At the beginning of the second century AH, the movement of the campaigners of Banu Hashim⁷ commenced in Khurasan and many people there embraced Shi'ism. Ya'qubi narrates,

When Zayd was martyred, the Shi'ah in Khurasan were in great commotion and expressed their faith in Shi'ism. The preachers were openly stating the atrocity and tyranny of the Umayyads against the descendants of the Prophet (S).⁸

It remained so until such time that Yahya ibn Zayd went to Khurasan and lived there in disguise for sometime. And when he rose up, many people gathered around him.⁹ Mas'udi narrates, "On the year when Yahya was killed, every infant that was born in Khurasan was named Yahya."¹⁰

Of course, due to the presence of Zaydis and 'Abbasid campaigners, Shi'ism of the people of Khurasan had more Zaydi and Kaysani color. This is particularly true in view of the fact that in the beginning, the 'Abbasids laid the foundation of their legitimacy upon the succession of Muhammad ibn 'Ali to Abu Hashim, son of Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah. As Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani writes in describing 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah:

He is the same person whom the Shi'ah of Khurasan were thinking to be the heir of his father whom they thought was the Imam. His heir in turn was Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn 'Abd Allah ibn al-'Abbas while Muhammad ibn 'Ali designated Ibrahim as his successor. In this manner, succession among the Abbasids was institutionalized.¹¹

The Khurasanis had always been supporters of the ‘Abbasids, and when the dichotomy between the ‘Alawis and ‘Abbasids occurred, they sided with the latter. For example, during the battle against Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah most of the ‘Abbasid soldiers were Persian-speaking Khurasanis.

Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani narrates:

When Khudhayr Zubayri, one of the commanders of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah, was coming to the battlefield from Medina, the Khurasanis were saying in Persian, “*Khudhayr amad; Khudhayr amad*” {Khudhayr came; Khudhayr came}. [12](#)

b. Qum

Qum has been one of the most important Shi‘ah-populated cities since the second century AH. This city, apart from being founded after the advent of Islam, has been founded by the Shi‘ah and Shi‘ah resided in and populated it from the very beginning. It is Shi‘ah Imamiyyah that has always been there without experiencing any deviation. Not only have *Sinyan* ever lived there but also the *Ghulat* did not find their way there, and even if they had, the people would have rejected them. [13](#) Many of the people there used to come to the pure Imams (‘a) to learn from these great personages, always maintaining contact with their Imams.

In 82 AH when the revolt of Ibn Ash‘ath against Hajjaj was crushed and he fled to Kabul, [14](#) a number of his soldiers were also Shi‘ah such as ‘Abd Allah, Ahwas, Na‘im, ‘Abd ar-Rahman, and Ishaq, sons of Sa‘d ibn Malik ibn ‘Amir al-Ash‘ari, who went to the districts of Qum after the defeat of Ash‘ath. There were seven villages there one of which was known as “Kamandan”. After these brothers’ stay in this village, their kith and kin joined them and resided in all the seven villages. Gradually, these seven villages merged together and they all become “Kamandan”. Kamandan was Arabized and shortened into “Qum”. [15](#)

From then on, Qum has become one of the most important concentration centers of the Shi‘ah, and the ‘Alawis in particular, who arrived and resided there from everywhere. [16](#) At the end of the second century AH, the arrival of Lady Fatimah al-Ma‘sumah (Imam ar-Ridha’s (‘a) sister) is considered the turning point in the history of this city, bringing about ample blessings to it.

c. Baghdad

Baghdad was founded during the second century *hijri*, 145 AH in particular, by Mansur, the second ‘Abbasid caliph, and soon became one of the demographic concentration centers of the Shi‘ah. [17](#)

This fact was unambiguously proved in Imam al-Kazim (‘a) burial procession. The huge number of attendants seriously alarmed the ‘Abbasids so much so that Sulayman ibn Mansur, Harun ar-Rashid’s uncle, participated in it barefooted just to appease the people. [18](#)

Baghdad was founded in Iraq and most of the people of Iraq were Shi'ah. Although Baghdad at the beginning was a military and political city, with the passage of time the intellectual center of the Muslim world was also transferred there and Shi'ah of the neighboring cities such as Kufah, Basrah, Mada'in among others took residence there and very quickly constituting a large population. After the minor occultation {*ghaybah as-sughrah*}, Baghdad became the intellectual and religious center for the Shi'ah who flourished there by virtue of the Shi'ah government of Al Buyah (Buyeds), until such time that Shaykh at-Tusi transferred the Shi'ah center to Najaf.

The Shi'ah-Populated Places during the Third Century Hijri

The geographical expansion of Shi'ism in the third century AH can be discussed and studied in two ways; the first is through the formation of the Shi'ah states in the Muslim territories. In 250 AH the 'Alawis in Tabaristan formed a government. [19](#)

During the latter part of the third century AH, descendants of Imam al-Husayn ('a) set up a Zaydi government in Yemen. In 296 AH the Fatimid state was established in the north of Africa. [20](#) These governments were not based on Shi'ah Imamiyyah fundamentals, but their existence showed the extent of Shi'ism and indicated the fertile ground for its acceptance in the Muslim territories—an opportunity which had been utilized by the Isma'ilis and Zaydis.

The second way is through the list of regions where the pure Imams ('a) designated proxies. The institution of deputyship {*wikalah*} had been founded since the time of Imam as-Sadiq ('a), and during the time of Imam al-Hadi and Imam al-'Askari ('a) the activity of this institution had reached its climax. The regions where the Imams' ('a) deputies were dispatched included Ahwaz, Hamedan, Sistan, Bust, Rey, Basrah, Wasit, Baghdad, Egypt, Yemen, Hijaz, and Mada'in. [21](#)

Of course, Kufah, Qum, Samarra, and Nayshabur were considered as the most important Shi'ah-dominated cities till the end of the third century AH, and the Shi'ah jurisprudence based on the traditions of the pure Imams ('a) was taught there. After the third century, nevertheless, Kufah declined in importance being gradually replaced by Baghdad, and with the arrival of the Al Buyah and the presence of distinguished figures such as Shaykh al-Mufid, Sayyid Murtadha, Sayyid Radhi, and Shaykh at-Tusi, the religious seminary in Baghdad flourished.

Regarding the Shi'ah influence in Baghdad during the fourth century AH, Adam Mitch (?) thus writes:

But in Baghdad which was the capital of Islam in its true sense and where the waves of all intellectual currents were strong, all schools of thought had followers. Of all these schools of thought, two were the strongest and most uncompromising—Hanbali and Shi'ah.

The followers of Shi'ism were particularly concentrated around the market of Karakh and only at the end of the fourth, this direction to the major bridge in Bab at-Taq was also populated. In places west of

Dajlah, especially Bab al-Basrah, Hashimis ('Abbasid *sadat*) constituted a strong community with intense enmity toward the Shi'ah.

Yaqut thus writes: "The residents of the district of Bab al-Basrah, between Karakh and Qiblah, were all Hanbali Sunnis, and those on the left and western parts of Karakh were also Sunnis. But the people of Karakh were entirely Shi'ah and no Sunni could be found among them."

...As recorded by historians, the first time the Shi'ah of Baghdad gathered in Baratha Masjid in 313 AH, it was reported to the caliph that a group is gathering there to collectively curse the caliphs.

The caliph ordered for it to be besieged on Friday at the time of congregational prayer, and thirty worshippers were arrested and searched. Baked clays {*muhr*} with the name of the Imam engraved therein were found on them... In 321 AH, 'Ali ibn Yalbakh, the Turkish commander, ordered for the cursing of Mu'awiyah and Yazid on the pulpits.

The public made a hullabaloo, and Barbahari, the leading Hanbali, and his supporters were identified as the ones responsible for the unrests. On account of the seditions and attitudes of the Hanbalis toward the people in 323 AH, it was ordered that two Hanbalis should not be seen together anywhere in Baghdad, and the 'Abbasid caliph Radhi issued an order in which the offenses to be committed by the Hanbalis and their corresponding punishments were indicated.[22](#)

Lesson 20: Summary

During the 'Abbasid period, the 'Alawi movements constantly emerged, a definite consequence of which was the diaspora of the 'Alawis in the different regions. As such, during the second century AH, Shi'ism transcended beyond the frontiers of the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq.

The journey of the 'Abbasid campaigners to Khurasan began at the beginning of the second century AH, where many people initially embraced Shi'ism though Shi'ism with more Kaysani influence.

Since the second century AH, Qum has become one of the most important Shi'ah-dominated cities. This city was founded by the Shi'ah and Shi'ism there has always been Ithna 'Ash'ari Imamiyyah. Although Baghdad was the capital of the 'Abbasid caliphate, by the transfer of Shi'ah from the neighboring cities such as Kufah, Basrah and Mada'in, it became one of the demographic concentration centers of the Shi'ah.

During the third century AH, Shi'ism was extended in many regions in the Muslim territories. This fact is clearly illustrated from the list of the regions where the pure Imams ('a) had their representatives. It was for this reason that the Shi'ah governments in Tabaristan, Yemen and Africa were set up.

Up to the end of the third century AH, Kufah, Qum, Samarra, and Nayshabur were regarded as the most important Shi'ah-populated cities.

Lesson 20: Questions

1. Name the regions populated by the Shi'ah during the second century AH.
2. In what periods did Shi'ism in Khurasan start?
3. Which type of Shi'ism has been in Qum?
4. How did Baghdad become one of the Shi'ah-populated cities?

1. 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyin (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH), p. 146.
2. Ibid., p. 157.
3. 'Ali ibn Husayn ibn 'Ali Mas'udi, Murawwij adh-Dhahab, 1st edition (Beirut: Manshurat Mu'assasah al-A'lami Li'l-Matbu'at, 1411 AH), vol. 3, p. 326.
4. Ibid.
5. Abu Isma'il ibn Nasir ibn Tabataba, Muntaqilah at-Talibiyyin, trans. Muhammad Rida 'Ata'i, 1st edition (Mashhad: Intisharat-e Astan-e Quds-e Radhawi, 1372 AHS), p. 207.
6. Ibid.
7. It must be noted that the term, "Banu Hashim" or "Hashimiyan" at the time also included the 'Abbasids as they were also grandchildren of Hashim.
8. Ibn Wadhih, Tarikh al-Ya'qubi, 1st edition (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1414 AH), vol. 2, p. 171.
9. Maqatil at-Talibiyyin, p. 149.
10. Murawwij adh-Dhahab, p. 336.
11. Maqatil at-Talibiyyin, p. 123.
12. Ibid., p. 238.
13. Rijal ibn Dawud (Qum: Manshurat ar-Radhi, n.d.), pp. 240, 270.
14. Murawwij adh-Dhahab, vol. 3, p. 149.
15. Shahab ad-Din Abi 'Abd Allah Yaqt Hamawi, Mu'jam al-Buldan, 1st edition (Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, 1417 AH), vol. 7, p. 88.
16. Muntaqilah at-Talibiyyin, pp. 333-339.
17. Mu'jam al-Buldan, vol. 2, p. 361.
18. Sayyid Muhsin Amin, A'yan ash-Shi'ah (Beirut: Dar at-Ta'aruf Li'l-Matbu'at, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 29.
19. Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir ibn Rustam Tabari, Tarikh at-Tabari, 2nd edition (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1408 AH), vol. 5, p. 365.
20. Jalal ad-Din 'Abd ar-Rahman Suyuti, Tarikh al-Khulafa' (Qum: Intisharat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1411 AH), p. 524.
21. See Sayyid Majid Pur Aqa'i, Tarikh-e 'Asr-e Ghaybat (Qum: Markaz-e Jahani-ye 'Ulum-e Islami, n.d.), p. 19.
22. Adam Mitch, Tamaddun-e Islami dar Qarn-e Chaharum-e Hijri {Islamic Civilization in the Fourth Century Hijri}, trans. 'Ali Rida Dhakawati Qaragzeli (Tehran: Mu'assaseh-ye Intisharat-e Amir Kabir, 1364 AHS), pp. 85-86.

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