

The Age of the Imam

It may be very useful or necessary to study the age of Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) and shed lights on the political, social, religious, cultural, and other sides of that age. Studying an age is one of the methodical researches that is too necessary in the modern studies because it uncovers important sides of the external influences on man and shows his intellectual and all psychological tendencies that arise from his age and environments as psychologists says.

Political life

The political life in the time of Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) was very bad. There was no security in all countries of the Islamic world. Anarchy was everywhere because the Abbasid government lost its authority and influence and no longer had its terrible power it had during the reigns of al-Mansur, ar-Rasid, and al-Ma'mun. The reasons behind that were:

The Prevailing of the Turks on the Rule

The Turks controlled the reins of power and prevailed on all the bodies of the state to a degree that the Abbasid caliph had no authority or influence. The decisions were in the hands of the Turks. They appointed and deposed whoever they liked of caliphs, viziers, and officials. One of poets described the state of al-Musta'een by saying,

“A caliph in a cage between Waseef and Bugha,
he repeated what they both said to him as a parrot does.”

The Abbasid caliphs in that period were like parrots. They had nothing from the caliphate. The Turks did everything whereas the caliph was in name only with no will or option.

The caliphate declined and lost its solemnity and superiority, and the caliphs had no significance. It was mentioned that when al-Mu'tazz assumed the caliphate, some of his companions sent for a diviner and asked him how long the caliph would sit on the throne and how long he would live. A humorous man from among the attendants said, 'I know that.' They asked him to tell them and he said, 'The matter is in

the hands of the Turks. They decide how long he rules and how long he lives.’ They all burst into laughter.¹

Al-Mu’tasim, the Abbasid caliph, appointed Ashnas the Turk as the wali and gave him the right to appoint walis. It was prayed for Ashnas on the minbars² whereas praying was limited to the caliphs before.

During his reign, al-Wathiq appointed Ashnas as the wali on Baghdad and expanded his authority until over Morocco. He gave him the right to run the affairs of all those countries and to appoint whoever he liked without referring to the caliph. The caliph entrusted Ashnas with all the affairs of the state and dressed him with two sashes of jewels.³

Ignorance of the Turks

The Turks had no any expertness in the affairs of rule and administration or in the political and economical affairs. They were like nomads in all their behaviors.

Al-Jahidh said about them, ‘The Turks are people of tents, inhabitants of deserts, and owners of cattle. They are the nomads of the non-Arabs. Crafts, trade, medicine, agriculture, engineering, building, digging rivers, and yielding did not attract their attention. Their interest was in invasions, raids, hunting, riding, fighting against heroes, searching for booties, and subjugating countries.

Their determination towards all that was well known and all meanings and means were subjected to that. They mastered these matters and were skilled in them. It is these things that are their crafts, trades, pleasure, pride, discourse, and night chat.’

The affairs of the state were in the hands of these rudes who knew nothing about civilization or development. Therefore, the nation faced dangerous crises, terrible problems, and too many misfortunes and bloody events.

Corruption of the Rule

From the direct results of the domination of the Turks over the rule was the corruption of the rule and inadvertency. Bribe was widespread among the officials of the state. The viziers, walis, and clerks embezzled the monies of land taxes and other taxes and the yields that came to the state from different countries.

In 229 AH, al-Wathiq, the Abbasid caliph, confiscated from the clerks of the divans about two million dinars,⁴ and al-Mutawakkil confiscated ibn az-Zayyat’s money which he had embezzled and the wealth of his clerk Umar bin al-Faraj ar-Rakhji. It was said that al-Mutawakkil took from him about one hundred and twenty thousand dinars and from his brother about one hundred and fifty thousand dinars.⁵ He also took from the chief of judges Yahya bin Aktham seventy-five thousand dinars.⁶

Shawqi Dhayf comments on this by saying, 'This means that the viziers, clerks, and walis embezzled the wealth of the state and nation. One thinks that there was no senior official in the state unless he committed abominable crime. The walis bribed the vizier in order to stay in their posts. Sometimes bribe was about two hundred thousand dinars besides gems and other gifts.'⁷

Even the muhtasibs ⁸ took bribes and embezzled money through their watching traders and merchants and the movement of buying and selling in the markets. It was narrated that Ahmad bin at-Tayyib bin Marwan ar-Rakhsi, the philosopher, breached the trust when he was the chief of the muhtasibs in Baghdad. He took, by this way, about one hundred and fifty dinars besides other gifts and presents.⁹ We do not exaggerate if we say that most officials of the state were involved in that embezzlement and bribes.'¹⁰

The spread of bribe in this manner was a clear evidence on the corruption of the senior officials in the Abbasid government and that most of the officials embezzled the wealth of Muslims unjustly.

The Walis of the Islamic Districts

The walis over the Islamic countries often bought their jobs and posts from the viziers. The vizier al-Khaqani sold the post of the wali over Kufa to nineteen walis in one day and took from each of them bribe.

Most walis went too far in wronging people and extorting their money unjustly which made most people complain of their injustice and oppression. At the days of al-Wathiq, his vizier Muhammad bin Abdul Melik composed a poem and ascribed it to one of the soldiers and gave it to the caliph.

He mentioned a flow of grievances and distresses that the walis poured over the nation. In his poem he expressed the misfortunes of the nation and the endless sufferings people received during the days of those walis whom al-Wathiq set up on the Islamic districts and entrusted with all the affairs of Muslims. They were excessive in oppression. They embezzled the treasury and threw the innocent into dark prisons and cells of torture.

The Hatred towards the Abbasid Rule

Muslims of all trends and tendencies hated the Abbasid rule and wished it to disappear a moment after another because of the bad, devious policies of the Abbasid rulers which were different from the laws of the Islamic Sharia in most cases, where the wicked became masters and the free were subdued. The corruption of the Abbasid governments brought Muslims disasters and misfortunes and threw them into great dangers.

The Abbasid rulers and their officials extorted the wealth of the nation and killed the great and reformers. They killed many people like the great martyr Zayd the son of Imam 'Ali bin al-Husayn who were

martyred in the way of justice during the reign of the Umayyads. They killed a big group of the Alawids like Yahya bin Amr bin al-Husayn and others who resisted injustice and oppression. Anyhow, Muslims hated the Abbasid governments and disapproved their oppression and despotism against people.

Oppressing the Alawids

From the worst faces of the clumsy politics the Abbasid followed was the oppression against the Alawids who were the heralds of the social justice in Islam. The Alawids were tried very severely and they suffered distresses that no one had ever suffered in the world of Islam and especially during the reign of al-Mutawakkil who spared no effort in oppressing and punishing them. He poured on them a flow of misfortunes and distresses. Historians said that his vizier Ubaydillah bin Yahya bin Khaqan encouraged him to oppress them. [11](#)

Economical Blockade

Al-Mutawakkil imposed an economical blockade on the Alawids and officially forbade people from helping or doing any good to them. Whenever he was informed that someone did them good even a bit he subjected him to severe punishments. [12](#) Therefore, people refrained from helping them with any kind of help or giving them any of the legal dues for fear of the revenge and punishment of the tyrant.

The economical blockade harmed the Alawids and exhausted them to a degree that one dress was used by some women of them. One of them wore it and offered the prayer and then another one and so on. They always patched it. They sat at their spindle semi naked with unveiled heads, [13](#) whereas the tyrant al-Mutawakkil spent on his red nights millions of dinars and gifted, without measure, thousands to singers, drinking companions, and effeminates, but prevented the progeny of the messenger of Allah (SwT) from receiving their rights and legal dues until he made them poor and wretched.

One day, al-Fath bin Khaqan the vizier gave al-Mutawakkil a very beautiful maid as a present. She came to him carrying a gold cup and a vat of crystal full of wine. He spent his nights with singers, female dancers, and wine whereas the progeny of the Prophet (S) suffered poverty, hunger, and all kinds of distresses.

The Abbasid women and the singers and dancers around them strutted in silk and brocade while the daughters of the messenger of Allah (SwT) had no clothes to cover themselves with. Those dark days passed and al-Mutawakkil recorded in his history black pages full of sins and crimes against the progeny of the Prophet(a.s.).

Gifting Monies to Disparage The Alawids

Al-Mutawakkil gifted great monies to mercenary poets who criticized the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) in their poetry. He gave abundant money and gold to Marwan bin Abu al-Janub and appointed him as wali on Yemen

and Bahrain just for his hatred and criticism in his poems against the Alawids. So did he with other insipid poets who sold their consciences and distorted the truth just for some transient pleasures of this world.

Jailing the Alawids

From the hard and severe distresses the Alawids suffered during the reign of al-Mutawakkil was imprisonment. Al-Mutawakkil arrested and threw many of them into dark prisons for no guilt but just because they called for the rights of the nation and they adopted its aims and wishes.

From among the prominent Alawids, who were imprisoned by al-Mutawakkil at that time, was Muhammad bin Salih the great-grandson of Imam al-Hasan (a.s.),¹⁴ and Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Ja'far al-Husayni who was arrested by Abdullah bin Tahir, who was one of al-Mutawakkil's governors, and imprisoned in Naysabour. He remained in prison until he died.¹⁵

Some other Alawids ran away and lived disguisedly in far towns and villages for fear of the Abbasid government like Ahmad bin Eesa bin Zayd bin 'Ali bin al-Husayn, who died in loneliness,¹⁶ and Abdullah bin Musa bin al-Hasan who was from the eminent Alawids and well-known heroes. He hid himself for fear of the Abbasids,¹⁷ besides many others as mentioned by Abul Faraj al-Isfahani and other historians.

The Revolt of Martyr Yahya

Yahya bin Umar bin al-Husayn bin Zayd revolted against the Abbasid government calling for the rights of the oppressed and persecuted people and inviting to establish the rule of Allah in the earth. He was a brave knight far away from the recklessness of the youth. He was not accused of any defect.¹⁸ People loved him and were loyal to him because he began his rising by refraining from shedding blood or taking anything from people's properties. He treated the all with justice and fairness.

The cause of his revolt was for an isolation and misfortune he and others suffered from the Turks during the reign of al-Mutawakkil.¹⁹ Groups from the people of Kufa followed him and he revolted with them during the reign of al-Musta'een. The caliph assigned Muhammad bin Tahir to fight Yahya. He marched towards him with a big army. After violent fighting Yahya was martyred and a page from the bright pages of jihad in Islam was folded.

After the martyrdom of Yahya, Muhammad bin Tahir sat in a public meeting to receive congratulations for killing the progeny of the messenger of Allah (SwT). Villains and flatterers showed him joys and delight and congratulated him for the victory of killing the grandson of the messenger of Allah.

Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari went to Muhammad bin Tahir and said to him, 'O emir, you are delighted for killing a man, who if the messenger of Allah was alive he would be consoled for his death.'

Muhammad bin Tahir became silent and terrible silence prevailed over the meeting.

The captives from Yahya's companions were taken to Baghdad after receiving too severe harms and torture. Historians says that they were drawn barefoot and whoever of them was late would be killed until the book of al-Musta'een arrived ordering them to be set free and they were set free.[20](#)

People became sad for the death of Yahya and wept for him too much. No one was elegized more than him. Many well-known poets elegized him and criticized the Abbasids.

Anyhow, the killing of Yahya was one of the great, shocking events in that age, for by killing him the sanctity of the Prophet (S) was violated whereas Allah, in the Holy Qur'an, had made the love for the Prophet's progeny as the reward for the Prophet's efforts in carrying out the mission of Allah.

Destroying the Tomb of Imam Husayn

Al-Mutawakkil destroyed the tomb of Imam al-Husayn (a.s.) and this was one of many other terrible misfortunes Muslims were afflicted with at that time. Al-Mutawakkil was full of rage whenever he heard or saw crowds of people visit the shrine of Imam al-Husayn (a.s.) the master of the youth of Paradise, whereas the graves of his (al-Mutawakkil's) fathers and their cousins the Umayyads turned into dunghills in dark, dreary places which were resorts for beasts. Those graves, with their misery and gloominess, told the oppression and violence of their inhabitants against Muslims.

The direct reason that made al-Mutawakkil destroy the holy shrine was that some songstress sent him her maids before he assumed the rule to sing for him when he drank, and when he became the caliph, he sent for her to send him a songstress but she was not there. It was said to him that she had gone to visit the holy tomb of Imam al-Husayn (a.s.).

She was informed of that while she was in Kerbala. She hurried back to Baghdad and sent al-Mutawakkil one of her maids. He asked the maid where they were and she said, 'My lady went to perform the hajj (pilgrimage) and took us with her.' It was the month of Sha'ban. Al-Mutawakkil was astonished and said to her, 'Where did you perform the hajj in Sha'ban?' She said, 'To the tomb of al-Husayn.'

The tyrant was alarmed and angry when he heard that the pilgrimage was to the holy tomb of Imam al-Husayn (a.s.). He arrested the lady of the maid and confiscated all her wealth, and ordered his officials to destroy the tomb. They refused insistently to destroy the tomb of the grandson of their Prophet. Then, al-Mutawakkil asked some Jews, headed by ad-Dayzaj, to destroy the tomb.

They responded to him and destroyed the holy tomb in 237 AH,[21](#) and destroyed all buildings around the tomb. They plowed the land around the tomb and made water flow over the land [22](#) but water turned around the tomb without reaching to it; therefore, it was called al-Ha'ir. A pleasant smell was emitted from the tomb that people had never smelt like it.[23](#)

A nomad from bani Asad got the honor of visiting the holy tomb after it had been destroyed. He began smelling the earth so that it might guide him to the holy tomb. When he took a handful of earth, smelt it, and found it emitting a very pleasant smell. He cried and addressed Imam al-Husayn (a.s.) saying, 'May my father and mother die for you! How fine you are! How fine your tomb is, and how fine your earth is!' Then he recited the following verse,

"They wanted to hide his tomb from his companion, but the fine smell of the tomb's earth guided to the tomb."²⁴

Al-Mutawakkil wanted to remove the tomb of Imam Husayn (a.s.), the master of the youth of Paradise, and to remove any trace leading to it but all his efforts were in vain. The holy shrine of Imam Husayn (a.s.) remained high throughout history. It was and is still the holiest place that all human beings of different trends and beliefs sanctified and still sanctify. Millions of people visit this holy shrine every year.

Professor Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad says, 'It is today a sanctuary that Muslims, agreeing or disagreeing, circumambulate, and it deserved to be circumambulated by every man. It is an eternal symbol of that which this alive human gives among all creatures. The dome of the heaven has never shaded a place of a martyr at all more honorable than those domes with the meaning of martyrdom and the memorandum of martyrs...'²⁵

Forbidding Muslims from Visiting Al-Husayn

Al-Mutawakkil forbade Muslims officially from visiting the holy shrine of Imam Husayn (a.s.). He established military checkpoints and distributed spies everywhere to watch and chase the visitors and punish them severely with killing, crucifying, cutting the hands, and other kinds of punishment. In spite of all those severe punishments, Muslims did not refrain from visiting the grandson of their holy Prophet (S). They crowded around the holy shrine.

When al-Mutawakkil knew about that, he sent one of his leaders with an army to prevent people from visiting the shrine. People resisted and said to the leader, 'If you kill us all, we will not refrain from visiting him (Imam Husayn).' He wrote to al-Mutawakkil about the situation and al-Mutawakkil ordered him to give up.

In 247AH al-Mutawakkil was informed that people in great masses came to visit the holy shrine. He sent them a big army and ordered the caller to call out that al-Mutawakkil would be free from whoever visited al-Husayn.²⁶ He killed, imprisoned, and imposed big taxes on people but he failed to stop them from visiting the holy shrine of Imam al-Husayn (a.s.). People offered their lives and wealth generously for the sake of visiting Imam al-Husayn (a.s.).

Complaint of Muslims

Muslims complained of al-Mutawakkil and abused him in their societies and meetings. They wrote the cursing against him on mosques and walls, in the streets of Baghdad and other towns. The following verses, which were composed by a poet who concealed his name for fear of the government though it was ascribed to ibn as-Sikkit or al-Bastami,²⁷ were memorized by people and spread among all classes of society:

“By Allah, if the Umayyads had killed the son ²⁸ of the Prophet unjustly,
his cousins ²⁹ did the same; here is his tomb destroyed!
They felt sorry that they did not participate in killing him,
So they chased him in the grave.’³⁰

The Abbasids exceeded what the Umayyads did in oppressing and distressing the Alawids. In fact, in spite of all severity and malice the Umayyad treated the Alawids with, they were better and nobler much more than most of the Abbasid kings. Some Umayyad rulers had had virtues that the founder of the Abbasid state al-Mansur ad-Dawaniqi had not any as Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said.

Economical life

The economical life in the age of Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) was absolutely confused. There was no scientific, economical system that the state depended on. The state sank under economical confusion that was governed by neither the Islamic economical system nor others. The caliph, the Turks, the viziers, and the officials robbed the economy of the nation and extorted its wealth, and then accumulated great capitals in their private treasuries at the time when poverty and wretchedness were widespread everywhere in the nation.

The majority of people moaned under the pressure of poverty. They could not have the slightest necessities of living whereas al-Mutawakkil and other Abbasid caliphs, who were contemporary with Imam al-Hadi (a.s.), excessively wasted the wealth of Muslims.

The Waste of Al-Mutawakkil

Al-Mutawakkil spent the wealth of Muslims on his lusts and pleasures over the limit. The treasury was as his own property and he spent from it as he liked. Al-Mas’oudi says, ‘Expenditures did not reach at any time what it reached at the time of al-Mutawakkil.’³¹ The wealth was spent on singers, the maids of the palace who were about four thousands, clowns, and the poets who disparaged the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and this class were given great amounts. The wealth of Muslims was spent excessively in this way while it was supposed to be spent on Muslims to better their lives and conditions.

When one of his sons was circumcised, al-Mutawakkil held a festival and spent uncountable money. Al-

Imrani reported that event by saying, 'A tablecloth was spread at the bank of the Tigris and people of all classes had food. Then cups of wine were served and people drank. Al-Mutawakkil ordered woollsacks full of dinars and dirhams mixed together to be brought. Heaps of money were made before people. A caller called out that whoever drank a cup of drink could take three handfuls of that money.

Every one took three handfuls and it was so on until the sunset. Al-Mutawakkil also ordered dinars and dirhams to be poured in the middle of the meeting. The money was poured and was so much that it prevented people from seeing each other. A caller called out that Amir'ul- Mu'minin (al-Mutawakkil) allowed the attendants to loot from those monies. People threw themselves on those heaps of money and carried them off. When night came, candles of ambergris were lit. Some of those candles were like date-palm trees which were set up at the bank of the Tigris where one at the other bank could read a book with the light of those candles.'³²

Celebrating the Homage to his Sons

Al-Mutawakkil spent great monies on the celebration he held on the occasion of taking homage to his sons Muhammad al-Muntasir, az-Zubayr al-Mu'tazz, and Ibrahim al-Mu'ayyad on Monday, the first of Muharram in 236AH. He invited all classes of people and spent astonishing amounts in that celebration. A tablecloth of about four farsakhs³³ was spread in the garden which he had established in Samarra' and built his palace known as al-Ja'fari in.

The palace was seven farsakhs long and one farsakh wide. It was filled with people. Statues of ambergris, camphor, and vessels of musk were put before people. Whoever drank a cup of drink, took some musk, smelt it, and put it into his pocket or gave it to his servant. The vessels were refilled continuously. It was so since the sunrise until the sunset. Al-Mutawakkil sat on a throne of gold studded with jewels and the heirs apparent were standing before him wearing crowns studded with jewels. People of different classes were sitting or standing. The sunrays reflected on gold vessels spread in the meeting, gold belts, and gilded swords and shields.

These abundant monies, which were spent on such celebrations and festivals, were the wealth of Muslims that must, according to Islam, be spent to improve the conditions of Muslims, grow their powers, and increase their incomes, but unfortunately nothing of that happened under the shadow of those corrupted regimes.

Bondmaids

The palaces of the Abbasids were crowded of bondmaids who were brought from different countries of the world. Al-Mutawakkil had about four thousand bondmaids and he slept with all of them.³⁴

Of course, millions of dinars from the treasury of Muslims were spent on these bondmaids, and because of these bad behaviors the general economy of the nation was paralysed.

Palaces

Al-Mutawakkil and other Abbasid caliphs built huge and unequaled palaces where no one had ever seen like them. One of al-Mutawakkil's palaces was built on a ship. Millions of dinars were spent on those palaces.

Ash-Shabasti said that the palaces cost al-Mutawakkil two hundred and seventy-four million dirhams and five hundred and thirteen million and twenty-five thousand dinars.³⁵ An-Nuwayri said that al-Mutawakkil spent on building his palaces about one hundred and fifty million dinars and two hundred and fifty-eight million and five hundred thousand dirhams.³⁶ Here we talk about some palaces of al-Mutawakkil:

1. Al-Ja'fari

It was the most important palace of al-Mutawakkil. The building of this palace cost him about two million dinars.³⁷ When the palace was completed, al-Mutawakkil sent for clowns and jesters, and when they performed some comic scenes, he gave them two million dirhams.³⁸ But time attacked al-Ja'fari and turned it into ruins that even beasts rejected it because it told the oppression and cruelty of al-Mutawakkil.

2. Al-Burj

It was a very beautiful palace. He spent on the building of this palace about one million and seven hundred thousand dinars.³⁹ Ash-Shabasti described it by saying, 'Al-Burj was the most beautiful building of al-Mutawakkil. He made in it big statues of gold and silver and a wide pool with plates of gold and silver.

Beside the pool there was a tree of gold with birds that whistled. It was adorned with jewels. He called the place Tuba as the name of the Paradise. A big throne of gold, with two big lions and a drawer having pictures of beasts and eagles, was made for him there with other things as the throne of Prophet Solomon (a.s.) had been described. The walls were covered from inside and outside with mosaic and gilded marble.'⁴⁰

3. Al-Maleeh

It was a wonderful palace. He spent on it five million dirhams.⁴¹

4. Ash-Shabandaz

It was one of his wonderful palaces that cost ten million dirhams.⁴²

5. Al-Mukhtar

It was a very wonderful palace that cost five million dirhams.⁴³ It had wonderful pictures, one of which was a picture of a church with monks.⁴⁴ This showed that he was influenced by Christianity.

6. Al-Gharw

It was a very beautiful palace that cost one million dirhams.⁴⁵

7. Barkwar

It was the most beautiful and most wonderful of al-Mutawakkil's palaces. He spent on it twenty million dirhams.⁴⁶ It was in this palace that al-Mutawakkil had held his excessive banquet on the occasion of circumcising his son al-Mu'tazz as we have mentioned before.

8. Al-Hayr

It was a beautiful palace that cost four million dirhams.⁴⁷

Al-Mutawakkil and other Abbasid caliphs adorned their palaces with wonderful pools surrounded by wonderful pictures and statues. They adorned some pools with plates of gold and silver and furniture studded with jewels and gems.⁴⁸

Those pools were a place of amusement for the Abbasid caliphs and they mocked at people. One day, al-Mutawakkil ordered Ibadah the effeminate to be thrown into one of those pools in the winter while it was very cold. Ibadah was about to die and then al-Mutawakkil ordered him to be taken out of water and to be given new clothes to put on. He approached and asked him, 'How are you now?'

Ibadah said, 'I have just come from the afterlife?'

Al-Mutawakkil laughed and asked him, 'How was my brother al-Wathiq there?'

Ibadah said, 'I did not visit the Hell.'

Al-Mutawakkil laughed and gifted him.⁴⁹

He shot Ibn al-Abrar the foolish poet by the mangonel and when he went high in the air, al-Mutawakkil said, 'Clear the way! The mangonel is coming to you.' The poet fell into the pool. Nets were thrown over him and he was caught like fish.⁵⁰

It was required from al-Mutawakkil to spend his time and efforts to serve the Islamic nation and work for its development in the economical, cultural, social, and other fields, but he did nothing of that. Instead, he spent his time and the wealth of Muslims on vanities, amusements, and lusts. His palaces were places for singing, drinking, and other vices.

Gifts To The Poets

Al-Mutawakkil and other Abbasid caliphs gifted great monies to mercenary poets who formed the most important part of the media at that time. The poets, who criticized the Alawids in their poems, got too much money because they fixed the position of the Abbasids and made people think that they were closer to the Prophet (S) and worthier of his position than the Alawids.

Once, Ibrahim bin al-Mudbir recited a poem praising al-Mutawakkil who was pleased with it and gave the poet fifty thousand dirhams and asked his vizier Ubaydillah bin Yahya to find him a good job.

He gave Abul Shibl al-Barjami thirty thousand dirhams after reciting him a poem of thirty verses,[51](#) and gave as-Sawli one hundred thousand dirhams, and so did his son.[52](#)

When Marwan bin Abul Janub praised him in a poem, he gave him two hundred thousand dirhams and new clothes. For another poem he gave him one hundred and twenty thousand dirhams, fifty garments, a mule, a horse, and a donkey.[53](#) The poet praised al-Mutawakkil on another occasion and got from him one hundred and twenty thousand dirhams and some clothes,[54](#) and fifty thousand dirhams on another occasion.[55](#)

As for 'Ali bin al-Jahm the poet, al-Mutawakkil made him so wealthy because he dedicated his poetry to praise the caliph particularly. The excessive gifts of al-Mutawakkil were not limited to poets only, but they included singers, clowns, and drinking companions. Al-Mas'oudi says, 'No one in his (al-Mutawakkil's) state was expert in serious or love poetry unless he got a good share of money.'[56](#)

The wealth of the nation and its economical abilities were dispelled on vanities, amusements, and pleasures. Nothing was spent on the public welfare. Shawqi Dhayf says,

"...In this way millions of dinars and dirhams were spent, without consideration or control, on the parties of the palace; those parties which supplied the stories of "A thousand and one nights" with all what might come to one's imagination of luxury and lavish spending. That wealth, which was supposed to be spent on preparing armies to resist the Turks and the Byzantines, was wasted foolishly while people strove and worked hard, but suffered poverty and wretchedness. At the same time, al-Mutawakkil and other than al-Mutawakkil played with the people's wealth.

Millions after millions were spent on building high palaces which were places for singing, dancing, and drinking, and heaps of gold and silver were scattered here and there. It was narrated that one day al-Mutawakkil was drunken in his palace called al-Barkwar. He said to his drinking companions where it was not the season of flowers, 'What do you think if we hold a festival of flowers?'

They said to him, 'These days are not of flowers.' He sent for Ubaydillah bin Yahya, who was one of his viziers, and asked him to coin five million dirhams each of two weights of silver. When the dirhams were coined, he ordered his vizier to dye some of the dirhams red, some yellow, some black, and to leave

some as they were.

The vizier did as he was ordered. Then al-Mutawakkil ordered his seven hundred servants and retinue to prepare a new garment and cap different in color from each other and they did. Al-Mutawakkil waited until a windy day came and he ordered a large tent of forty doors to be erected.

He came into the tent surrounded by his drinking companions and his servants wearing their new dresses. He ordered the dirhams to be scattered a group after another like flowers. They were scattered successively and the wind carried them for they were light. They flew in the air like flowers did.[57](#)

It was a result of idleness, and excessive luxury. The caliphs enjoyed life to the extent of foolishness and mania, whereas classes of people behind them lived in straits and pressing poverty.[58685](#)

The general economical life

The general economical life in the Islamic nation was absolutely bad. Poverty bit most of people who were in terrible neediness. The general wealth was accumulated near singers, clowns, the retinue and agents of rulers especially the Turks who were so wealthy that they did not know how to spend that wealth. They spent great monies on every kind of pleasure and lust.

Whenever they became bored with a pleasure they turned to another one. Thus, their lives passed between singing, amusement, and meetings of drinking that were held in the great palaces which were built with the money of the poor, the deprived, and the miserable.

Anyhow, the economical life in most of the Islamic countries was paralyzed or confused, and that made reformers to rise in armed revolts against the Abbasid rule.

Land Tax

The collection of the land tax was an important side in the economical life. The Abbasid governments entrusted this job to a group of severe and harsh men. They collected taxes that Islam had not legislated. They collected those taxes with all severe and violent means, and people suffered too much during those dark periods.

General Misery

The majority of the Islamic peoples suffered misery, poverty, and deprivation during the Abbasid ages. Ulama', men of letters, and thinkers often and always complained of their difficult lives. Poverty attacked most people that they hardly found a bite to satisfy their hunger or a rag to cover their semi-naked bodies against the cold of winter. Some well-known scholars, poets, and authors lived lives of misery.

Many times they could not find a bit of bread to eat or to give to their families and children. Studying and

seeking knowledge at that time led scholars to poverty and deprivation. As an example, al-Jahidh, who was one of the best and most eminent scholars, authors, and men of letters and intellect, suffered pressing neediness and misery, whereas singers, dancers, and clowns lived at absolute ease. Many poets of that age invited in their poetry towards asceticism and Sufism because of the poverty and deprivation they underwent.

The religious life

The religious life in the age of Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) was confused and turbid. Many suspicions and illusions were raised against the Islamic belief by the powers that had spites and enmities against Islam. Muslim ulama', and at the head was Imam al-Hadi (a.s.), confronted those suspicions and spurious arguments and they refuted them.

Heresies and Errors

A wicked group of atheists and apostates slipped among the Shi'a and spread some heresies and errors. Muslims were tried too much by these polytheists because of the falsehood they spread by which they misled simple and naïve people. The heads of those heretics were 'Ali bin Hasakah al-Qummi, al-Qassim al-Yaqini, al-Hasan bin Muhammad bin Baba al-Qummi, and Muhammad bin Nusayr.

The Heresies of Ibn Hasakah

Ibn Hasakah said that Imam Abul Hasan al-Hadi (a.s.) was the God, the creator, and the manager of the universe. He claimed that he (ibn Hasakah) was a prophet sent by Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) to guide people. He annulled the Islamic obligations such as zakat, the hajj, and fasting, for whoever believed in his belief. Simple people of no understanding believed him and inclined to his heresies.

One of Imam al-Hadi's companions wrote a letter to the Imam saying,

"May I die for you my sire! 'Ali bin Hasakah claims that he is from your guardians and that you are the First and the Old. He claims that he is your bab and your prophet, and that you yourself have ordered him to invite for that. He claims that prayer, zakat, hajj, and fasting are the knowing of you and the knowing of one who is like ibn Hasakah who is the bab and the prophet.

He says that whoever believes in this is a perfect faithful and therefore prayer, fasting, hajj, and other obligations are not required from him. Many people inclined to him. Would you please favor your followers with an answer to save them from perishment?'[59](#)

The Imam Disavows Him

Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) disavowed ibn Hasakah and invited people to reject him and reject his followers and kill them. He wrote a letter as a reply to the previous letter saying,

“Ibn Hasakah tells lies. The curse of Allah be on him! He is not one of my guardians. May Allah curse him. By Allah, Allah did not send Muhammad and the prophets before him except with prayer, zakat, fasting, hajj, and guardianship. Muhammad did not invite except to Allah alone with no partner. So do we, the guardians from his progeny.

We are slaves of Allah not associating with Him anything. If we obey Him, He will have mercy on us and if we disobey Him, He will torture us. We do not have any authority on Allah but Allah has the authority on us and on all His creatures. I, before Allah, disavow whoever says that and I resort to Allah from this saying. Desert them! May Allah curse them. Block them up into narrow passages and if you find any of them, split his head with stone!’[60](#)

The Heresies of Al-Fihri

Muhammad bin Nusayr al-Fihri an-Namiri was from the heads of atheists and the chiefs of unbelievers. He spread among people that Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) was the Creator and God. He permitted the marriage with one’s mahrams (close relatives that it is unlawful to get married to) like one’s mother, sister, daughter, and the like. He permitted sodomy and considered it as one of the good pleasures that Allah had not forbidden and that it was a means of being humble before Allah.

He believed in transmigration (of souls at or after death into another body).

By these heresies he tried to fight Islam and distort the reality of the infallible Imams (a.s.).

Interpreting the Obligations

These deviant atheists interpreted the Islamic obligations according to their own corrupted tendencies. They said that the prayer, which Allah had ordered to be performed, was not that known kind of worship but it was a particular man. They also said that the zakat was not the tax that Allah had imposed, but it was a particular man. They also interpreted the sins that Allah had prohibited according to their own tendencies.

Ibrahim bin Shaybah wrote a letter to Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) saying,

“May I die for you! There is a group of people among us disagreeing on acknowledging your virtues and position by different sayings that hearts are disgusted of and chests cannot bear. They narrate traditions on that that we cannot accept because they say terrible things and we cannot refute or deny if they are ascribed to your fathers. We are suspicious about these sayings. They interpret the meaning of the sayings of Allah,

...surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil, [61](#)

and

And keep up prayer and pay the zakat [62](#)

and say that prayer means a man and neither bowing nor prostration. They also say that zakat is a man and not the paying of money. They interpret other obligations in the same way and even sins. Would you please favor your followers with that which has their safety and rescue from the sayings (beliefs) that take them to perishment? From among those who claim they are guardians and invite people to follow them are ‘Ali bin Hasakah and al-Qassim al-Yaqtini. What do you say about them?”

Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) replied, ‘This is not from our religion and you have to reject it.’[63](#) Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) was tried seriously by those deviants who disbelieved in Allah and denied his signs.

The Imam warns against them

Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) warned his followers and the rest of Muslims from associating with those excessive atheists. He wrote to ‘Ali bin Muhammad bin Eesa, ‘May Allah curse al-Qassim al-Yaqtini and ‘Ali bin Hasakah al-Qummi. Satan has appeared to him and so he inspires falsehood to deceive others.’[64](#)

He also wrote to al-Ubaydi warning him from the heresies of those excessive atheists and inviting him to disavow them. He said in the letter, “I disavow, before Allah, al-Fihri and al-Hasan bin Muhammad bin Baba al-Qummi and you have to disavow them. I warn you and all my followers from them, and I curse them. The curse of Allah be on them.

They eat the monies of people in the name of us. They are seditious and harmful. May Allah harm them, throw them into curse, and plunge them into mischief. Ibn Baba claims that I have sent him (as an apostle) and that he is a bab. The curse of Allah be on him. Satan has mocked and seduced him. Allah may curse whoever accepts from him. O Muhammad, if you can split his head with stone, do! He has harmed me. May Allah harm him in this life and in the afterlife.”[65](#)

Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) asked his followers (the Shi’a) to kill the head of the extremists Faris bin Hatim. He said, ‘Faris claims that he acts in the name of me. He is seditious calling for heresies. His blood is to be shed by whoever can kill him. Who will relieve me from him by killing him and I will assure Paradise for him by the will of Allah?’[66](#)

One of the faithful responded to the Imam and killed Faris and relieved Muslims from him.

Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) permitted the killing of the extremists. He wrote to one of his companions, ‘...if you can overcome any of them, break his head with a stone!’[67](#)

Once, as-Sariy bin Salamah sent a letter to Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) asking him about the extremists and what they called for. The Imam replied to him, ‘May Allah keep you safe from their extremism. It suffices that the guardians of Allah have disavowed them. May Allah fix you on what you are in...in this life and in the afterlife and make you not go astray after He has guided you.’[68](#)

Causes of Extremism

The causes that led such people to say that Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) was the god and the creator of the universe were—as we think— as the following:

1. The charismata and miracles that Allah had endowed Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) and his fathers with, which the deviants and those who had spite towards the Imam advantaged of to fabricate heresies in order to attack Islam and do away with it.
2. The disengagement from the Islamic values and principles; and so they permitted all what Islam had prohibited.
3. The greed for people's wealth; therefore, they took it wrongly and extorted the legal dues that the Shi'a paid to their Imams (a.s.).

With the Waqifites

After the death of Imam Musa bin Ja'far al-Kadhim (a.s.), a sect from the Shi'a called the Waqifites appeared on the stage of the Islamic life. They denied the death of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.) and claimed that he was raised to the Heavens as Jesus Christ (a.s.) was. The chiefs of this sect claimed so because there were great monies of the legal dues of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.) with them.

They embezzled these monies and did not deliver them to Imam ar-Ridha (a.s.) after the death of Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.). This sect kept on resisting the Twelver Shi'a until the Shi'a called them as al-Mamturah (dirty dogs that were wetted by rain and they became (ritually) impure and consequently they would impurify whoever they might touch).

One of the Shi'a wrote to Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) asking him if it was permissible for him to curse those al-Mamturah in prayer, and the Imam replied to him that it was permissible.[69](#)

The Creation of The Qur'an

From the terrible problems Muslims were tried with in their religious life was the problem of “the creation of the Qur'an” which the Abbasid rulers contrived and spread to do away with their opponents. Many people were killed because of this heresy and spites and hostilities spread among Muslims.

Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) wrote a letter to Ahmad bin Isma'il bin Yaqtin in 227AH saying to him, “May Allah safeguard us and you from the sedition! If He does, it shall be a great blessing and if not, it shall be the perishment. We see that disputing on the Qur'an is a heresy that both the asker and the answerer participate in; the asker deals with what is not his and the answerer burdens himself with what it is not his duty.

The creator is but Allah the Almighty and whatsoever else is created, and the Qur'an is the speech of Allah. Do not make for Him a name from yourself so that you shall be from the deviants. May Allah make us and you from among those who fear their Lord in secret and they are fearful of the hour (of doom).⁷⁰

The life of amusement

The Abbasid kings, who ruled at the time of Imam al-Hadi (a.s.), indulged in pleasures, amusement, singing, and all lusts. Their red nights were full of drinking, singing, and dancing, but with no seriousness or any remembrance of Allah. Not only had the caliphs behaved so, but also their viziers, clerks, walis, officials, and in fact the rest of people. They pounced upon pleasures and amusements and turned away from the pure life that Islam had determined for them.

Wining

Drinking wine was widespread in that age. Al-Mutawakkil the caliph, his viziers, and his retinue drank wine often and it was something common for them. They were indifferent to the prohibition and the severe penalty that Islam had legislated for drinking wine. The bottles of wine were from the most precious presents for the Abbasids.

Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hamdun narrated that his father said, 'We went with al-Ma'mun and with al-Mu'tasim to fight the Romans. Muhammad bin Abdul Melik az-Zayyat gifted us with matured Iraqi drinks and wrote with them some verses of poetry.'

Al-Mutawakkil was the fondest of wine among the Abbasid kings, and all bodies of his government were like him. He spent most of his life between the cups of wine, and he was killed while he was drunk.

Debauchery

Debauchery and corruption spread widely during the reigns of the Abbasid kings. It was an outstanding phenomenon not only near the kings, but also near the rest of people. The general conduct of people at that time was colored with debauchery, dissoluteness, and vices. It was the kings themselves, who pounced upon amusement, desires, and all unlawful pleasures, that encouraged the rest of people to follow these ways. The spiritual life had influence neither inside their palaces nor on their conducts in the outside.

^{1.} Al-Fakhri, p. 181

^{2.} An-Nujum az-Zahirah, vol.2 p.229

^{3.} Tareekh al-Ya'qubi, vol.3 p.205

^{4.} Tareekh at-Tabari, vol.9 p. 125

^{5.} Muruj ath-Thahab, vol.4 p. 19

^{6.} Tareekh at-Tabari, vol.9 p. 197

^{7.} Al-Fakhri, p. 178

8. A muhtasib was the official who controlled prices, weights, and measures in the market
9. Muruj ath–Thahab, vol.4 p. 170
10. Al–Asr al–Abbasi ath–Thani (the second Abbasid age), p. 120–121
11. Maqatil at–Talibiyin, p.597
12. Ibid., p.599
13. Maqatil at–Talibiyin, p.599
14. Maqatil at–Talibiyin, p.600
15. Ibid., p.615
16. Ibid., p.619–627
17. Ibid., p.628
18. Maqatil at–Talibiyin, p. 639
19. Muruj ath–Thahab, vol.4 p.93
20. Maqatil at–Talibiyin, p.p.644
21. Akhbar ad–Duwal, p.359
22. Maqatil at–Talibiyin, p.598
23. Ibid
24. Sharh Shafiyat Abu Firas, vol.2 p. 144
25. Abu ash–Shuhada, by Abbas Mahmud al–Aqqad
26. Sharh Shafiyat Abu Firas, p. 144
27. Fawat al–Wafiyat, vol. 1 p.203
28. Imam Husayn (a.s).
29. The Abbasids who were the cousins of the Prophet (a.s) and of Imam Husayn (a.s).
30. Akhbar ad–Duwal, p. 159, Tareekh al–Khulafa’, p.347
31. Muruj ath–Thahab, vol.4 p. 159
32. Al–Anba’ fee Tareekh al–Khulafa
33. Farsang: a unit of distance equal to 6km
34. Siyer A’lam an–Nubala’, vol.8 p. 153, Tareekh al–Khulafa’, p.349, Akhbar ad–Duwal, p. 116.
35. Ad–Diyarat, p. 102
36. Nihayat al–Arab, vol. 1 p.406
37. Mu’jam al–Buldan, vol.2 p. 143
38. Tareekh at–Tabari, vol.9 p.212
39. Tareekh al–Ya’qubi, vol.3 p.222, ad–Diyarat, p. 103
40. Ad–Diyarat, p. 103
41. Mu’jam al–Buldan, vol.3 p. 175
42. Ibid., p.319
43. Mu’jam al–Buldan
44. Ibid., vol.5 p.70
45. Ibid., vol.4 p. 192
46. Ibid., vol.2 p.328
47. Mu’jam al–Buldan
48. Nihayat al–Arab, vol. 1 p.406
49. Al–Iqd al–Fareed, vol.6 p.430
50. Fawat al–Wafiyat by al–Kutubi, vol.2 p.356
51. Al–Aghani by Abul Faraj al–Isfahani, vol. 14 p. 193
52. Ibid., vol. 10 p.64
53. Al–aghani
54. Tareekh al–Khulafa’, p.349
55. Al–Aghani

- [56.](#) Tareekh al-Khulafa', p.349
- [57.](#) Ad-Diyarat, p. 160
- [58.](#) The Second Abbasid Age, p.68-69
- [59.](#) Rijal al-Kashshi
- [60.](#) Rijal al-Kashshi
- [61.](#) Qur'an, 29:45
- [62.](#) Qur'an, 2:43 and other verses
- [63.](#) Rijal al-Kashshi
- [64.](#) Rijal al-Kashshi
- [65.](#) Rijal al-Kashshi
- [66.](#) Ibid
- [67.](#) Wassa'il ash-Shi'a, vol. 18 p.554
- [68.](#) Ad-Durr an-Nadhim
- [69.](#) Rijal al-Kashshi
- [70.](#) At-Tawhid, p.224

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