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The Career of the Third Saf'ir, al-Nawbakhti

1. Al-Nawbakhti's Activities During the Time of the Second Saf'ir

The third *Saf'ir* was Abu al-Qasim al-Husayn b. Ruh b. Abi Bahr al-Nawbakhti. He remained in the office in the years 305–326/917–937, although the date of his birth is not known. According to Ibn Shahr Ashub, al-Nawbakhti was a close associate of the eleventh Imam, al'Askari, and was his Gate (*Bab*)¹, but it is difficult to accept such a report because al-'Askari died in 260/874 and al-Nawbakhti died in 326/937.

There are several reports indicating that al-Nawbakhti was a native of the traditional Shiite city of Qumm. Al-Kashshi and Yahya b. Abi Tayy (d. 630/1232) called him al-Qummi².

Moreover al-Nawbakhti was fluent in the Persian dialect of the people of Abah, one of the suburbs of Qumm³, and this suggests that he belonged to the branch of Banu Nawbakht resident in Qumm. However, he had emigrated to Baghdad during the time of the first *Saf'ir*. According to al-Tusi, he was brought up in Baghdad under the guardianship of Muhammad b. 'Ali Bilal,⁴ who later denied that Abu Ja'far al-'Umari was the second *Saf'ir* of the Twelfth Imam.

Al-Nawbakhti joined the service of the second *Saf'ir* and became his agent (*wakil*). Despite his youth al-Nawbakhti was distinguished by his shrewdness, particularly in his relations with opponents⁵.

Perhaps it was this quality which enabled him to climb quickly in the ranks of the organization.

Al-Nawbakhti spent several years working as an agent for the second *Saf'ir*, who used to pay him a salary of 30 dinars a month. He also received financial support from high Shiite officials and viziers like Banu Furat. The second *Saf'ir* employed him to look after his properties and made him the connecting link between himself and the other leaders of the Imamites⁶.

According to al-Tusi, al-Nawbakhti was the intermediary between the second *Saf'ir* and the two agents of Kufa, al-Zajawzji and Abu Ghalib al-Zurari⁷. His service in the *Wikala* helped him in contacting high

Shi'ite officials of the 'Abbasid administration, particularly his relatives Banu Nawbakht and also Banu Furat⁸.

By the year 298/910 he had become highly respected by the people. At that time an interesting occurrence took place which reveals his importance. Al-Saduq narrates that an 'Alid called al-'Aqiqi went to visit the vizier 'Ali b. 'Isa al-Jarrah asking him to solve his financial problems, but the vizier would not listen to him. Therefore al-Nawbakhti sent a message to al-'Aqiqi and solved his difficulties⁹.

This narration gives some indication of the social position of al-Nawbakhti while he was still an agent of the second *Saf'ir*.

2. The Installation of the Third *Saf'ir*

As we have already seen, (106-7) the ten eminent agents in Baghdad expected that Ja'far. b. Ahmad b. Matil would take over the office of the second *Saf'ir* when he died. But on his death bed, when the agents were all gathered together, he appointed Ibn Ruh al-Nawbakhti, saying that the Twelfth Imam had ordered him to do so¹⁰.

At that time the Imamites put forward different reasons for the designation of Ibn Ruh al-Nawbakhti. Umm Kulthum, the daughter of the second *Saf'ir*, thought that Ibn Ruh was promoted to the office of the deputyship (*sifara*) because of his close relationship with her father. She reports that her father even used to reveal to him what had occurred between himself and his slave-girls¹¹.

However, according to the agent Ibn Qurd, the other nine agents in Baghdad, especially Ibn Matil, were closer to the second *Saf'ir* than Ibn Ruh¹².

It seems most likely that Ibn Ruh had personal qualifications which made him a suitable *Saf'ir*. Indeed we have a report attributed to Abu Sahl al Nawbakhti to support this point. The latter was asked by some Imamites as to why he had not been promoted to the *sifara* instead of Ibn Ruh. He answered,

"They (the Imams) know best about whom they have selected for this office. I am a person who meets opponents and argues with them. If I had known what Abu al-Qasim (Ibn Ruh) knows about the Imam, perhaps in the course of my arguments, having found myself under the attack of enemies to give them wellfounded reasons for the existence of the concealed Imam, I would have pointed out his whereabouts.

But if Abu al-Qasim had the Imam underneath his garments, and if his flesh was being cut into pieces to make him reveal his whereabouts, he would not yield or reveal his presence to his foes." ¹³

This document indicates that Ibn Ruh was promoted to the *sifara* mainly because of his loyalty and the shrewdness which he had shown on several occasions. Therefore we cannot accept the opinion of Sachedina, who thinks that the appointment of Ibn Ruh as *Saf'ir* to the Twelfth Imam, "must have been

influenced by another eminent member of the Nawbakht family, namely Abu Sahl Isma'il b. 'Ali.

He was one of those leading Imamites, who were present in the last days of the second agent to bear witness to the designation of Abu al-Qasim as the agent."¹⁴

In fact, there are also many points to encourage us to disagree with Sachedina's opinion.

First, the installation of all the twelve Imams in the office of the Imamate from Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib until the time of the Twelfth Imam, had been carried out neither by the interference of their followers nor by election. As has been demonstrated repeatedly throughout this work the fact is that the promotion of each new Imam occurred according to the personal stipulation (*al Ta yin bi-l-Nass*) of the preceding Imam in his last will.

Moreover the installation of the first and second *Saf'irs* had followed the same method. They were promoted to the office of the *Wikala* by the order of the Imam and there is no evidence to prove that Ibn Ruh was not similarly appointed.

Second, none of the ten eminent agents, who were present at that meeting, expected to participate by election, nomination or other means in the appointment of Abu Ja'far's successor. On the contrary, they attended the meeting so as to know who would be stipulated as the third *Saf'ir* by the order of the Imam himself.

Third, the second *Saf'ir* had ordered his personal servant, Dhaka, that in the case of his death, he should hand his staff and the treasure chest over to Ibn Ruh¹⁵.

Fourth, if we take into consideration the fact that the rest of the ten agents recognised the promotion of Ibn Ruh, especially Ibn Matil, who was expected to be the third *Saf'ir*¹⁶, and the fact that al-Shalmaghani, even after his own aspiration to the office of the *Sifara* recognised Ibn Ruh as the *Saf'ir*¹⁷, it is clear that Ibn Ruh must in fact have been appointed by the Imam himself and neither Abu Sahl al-Nawbakhti nor his family did influence the Imam's decision.

3. The Activities of Ibn Ruh al-Nawbakhti

According to al-Dhahabi, after the death of the second *Saf'ir* in 305/917, his successor Ibn Ruh went to the headquarters (*Dar al-Niyaba*) of the organization, where he met the eminent Imamites such as the servant of the second *Saf'ir*, Dhaka. The latter prepared the things which his master had entrusted to him, that is, the staff and the treasure chest containing the seals of the Imams, and handed them over to Ibn Ruh as he had been instructed.

Thereafter Ibn Ruh together with the other agents went to the house of Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Shalmaghani¹⁸, his close associate who later became his rival.

From the very beginning, Ibn Ruh proved his ability to lead the organization successfully. His shrewdness enabled him to avoid the consequences of participation in the sectarian discussions which took place at the palace of Ibn Yasar, one of the high officials of alMuqtadir, the caliph. He used to attend those discussions only as a listener.

According to al-Tusi, Ibn Ruh was so cautious that he even discharged his servant because he had cursed Mu'awiya¹⁹. Perhaps he took this step to avoid the danger posed by the vizier, Hamid b. al-'Abbas (306-311/918-923), who was well-known for his hatred of Shiites generally²⁰.

There is evidence that the ten agents of the second *Saf'ir* continued their activities under al-Nawbakhti. Among these agents were Ja'far b. Ahmad b. Matil, Abu Abd Allah al-Katib, al-Hasan al-Wajna', Muhammad b. Humam, 'Isma'il b. Ishaq al-Nawbakhti, Ahmad b. Matil, Muhammad al-Aswad, and al-Madd'im. Two other names also appear in the lists of the agents in Baghdad: al-Shalmaghani and Ahmad b. Ibrahim al-Nawbakhti.

The latter was a narrator of traditions and the husband of Umm Kulthum, the daughter of the second *Saf'ir*, and Ibn Ruh employed him as his personal secretary. The former was appointed as an agent by Ibn Ruh after he had become the *Saf'ir*²¹.

Through his ten agents in Baghdad Ibn Ruh directed the activities of the Imamite agents and their underground political cells in the other provinces. He sent his first letter of instructions to the agent of al-Ahwaz, Muhammad b. Nafis, on 5th Shawwal 305/23rd November 917, in which he confirmed him in his office²².

He appointed his agent al-Shalmaghani to supervise the underground Imamite cells among the people of Band Bistam in Baghdad²³ and made him the mediator between himself and the agents of Kufa, Abu Ja'far al-Zajawzi and Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Zurari²⁴. Al-Shalmaghani continued his supervision of the agents of Kufa and Baghdad until the year 312/923, when Ibn Ruh discharged him from his office and excommunicated him after he had taught the incarnation of God in human form²⁵.

According to al-Tusi, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Hasan al-Wajna', one of the ten agents in Baghdad, practised his activities in Nisibin and Mosul. In 307/919 he met a certain individual called Muhammad b. al-Fadl al-Mawsili who denied that Ibn Ruh was the *Saf'ir* of the Twelfth Imam. He tried to convince him that Ibn Ruh was truly appointed as *Saf'ir* by the Imam, but al-Mawsili argued that, if Ibn Ruh was so, he must show miracles as the first and the second *Saf'irs* did before.

In order to content him, al-Hasan al-Wajna' brought him to Baghdad, where he saw with his own eyes Ibn Ruh's miracles which prompted him to recognize him as the rightful *Saf'ir*.²⁶

This report reveals that al-Hasan al-Wajna' was appointed by the third *Saf'ir* to direct the Imamites' activities in the province of Jazira. In Wasit, al-Hasan b. Muhammad b. Qatat al-Saydalani, the Wakd al-Waqf during the time of the second *Saf'ir*, and Ibn Matil, who had worked as the connecting link between al-Saydalani and the second *Saf'ir*²⁷, continued their activities during the time of Ibn Ruh²⁸.

As has already been noted, some reports reveal that because of the persecution of the Imamites which had been carried out by the caliphs al-Mu'tadid (279–89/892–902) and al-Muktafi (289–95/902–8) and their attempts to arrest the Imam, he changed his place of residence from Samarra to the Hijaz. This situation naturally led to difficulties as regards the methods of communication between him and his agents.

Furthermore information concerning the relations between the third *Saf'ir* and his agents in the other provinces is rare and obscure. However, there is evidence that the Imam continued to practise his activities from Mecca. Al-Tusi relates that a certain Ya qub b. Yusuf al-Ghassani saw a group of men from different provinces come to the house where the Imam lived and correspond with them through an old serving woman. Some of those men were from Baghdad²⁹.

Al-Saduq reports that the agent al-Hasan al-Wajna' met the Imam at the same house in 314/926,³⁰ which indicates that the residence of the Imam was in the Hijaz during the time of the third *Saf'ir*. But there is no available reference to the names of the agents in Mecca and Medina.

The Imam also had agents in Egypt who recognized the *sifara* of Ibn Ruh³¹. According to al-Tusi, al-Qasim b. al-'Ala was still the agent in Azerbaijan. He directed the Imamite activities through two assistants, that is Abu Hamid 'Umran b. al-Mufallis and Abu 'Ali b. Jahdar, and also used to look after the personal domain which the eleventh Imam, al-'Askari, had endowed to the Twelfth Imam.

Correspondence between al-Qasim b. al-'Ala and Ibn Ruh took place through a messenger who used to come to Azerbaijan. After the death of al-Qasim his son al-Hasan was promoted to the office by the order of the Imam³².

In Iran, Muhammad b. Ja'far al-Asadi al-Razi, the agent of Rayy, had been instructed by the second *Saf'ir* to supervise the activities of the agents of the other Iranian provinces. He continued this supervision during the time of the third *Saf'ir*³³. But after the death of al-Razi in 312/924,³³ the method of communication between the agents in Iran and Ibn Ruh changed from indirect correspondence via al-Razi to direct contact between Ibn Ruh and the agents.

Al-Saduq reports several narratives in support of this point. For example, 'Ali b. al-Husayn b. Babawayh, the leader of the Imamites in Qumm, made direct contact with the third *Saf'ir* via the agent in Baghdad, al-Aswad³⁴.

An agent from Balkh, Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Sayrafi, did likewise. He collected the tax dues (gold and silver) from the Imamites of Balkh and handed them over to Ibn Ruh in Baghdad, and he continued his direct contact even during the time of the fourth *Saf'ir*, al-Sammari³⁵.

In the same way al-Husayn b. 'Ali al-Qummi received ten gold ingots from Ibn Jawshir, who asked him to hand them over to Ibn Ruh, so he did so³⁶. These reports indicate that the position of Ibn Ruh as the *Saf'ir* of the Twelfth Imam became well known amongst the Imamites, in contrast to that of the first and

the second *Saf'irs*, whose office had been kept secret. For this reason some ordinary Imamites were encouraged to ignore the agents of their areas and contact the third *Saf'ir* directly.

Ibn Ruh was highly esteemed by the 'Abbasid court during the time of the caliph of al-Muqtadir (295–320/907–932). This can be attributed to the influence of Ibn Ruh's family, Banu Nawbakht, in the 'Abbasid administration, an influence which had begun during the time of the caliph al-Mansur (d. 158/774) and lasted until the time of al-Muqtadir. Ibn Ruh himself participated in the Abbasid administration. According to al-Jahshayari, he was at one point in charge of the personal domain of the caliph (*Diwan al-Diya al-Khasya*)³⁷.

Therefore we find some agents, such as Abu Ghalib al-Zurari, paying respect to Ibn Ruh because of the economic and political influence of his family³⁸. Abbas Iqbal illustrates Ibn Ruh's influence by reporting that, during the time of the vizier Hamid b. al'Abbas (306–311/918–923), Ibn Ruh's house became the place for the meetings of administrators, nobles, and deposed viziers, especially Banu Furat³⁹.

Most likely Ibn Ruh exercised his influence upon the Shi'ites, who were working in the administration, encouraging them to employ their brothers in faith in the 'Abbasid administration and offer financial help to the needy among the Shiites in general. Certain references indicate that these instructions were put into action by 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Furat. According to Ibn Khallikan, he used to support 5,000 people financially⁴⁰.

When he was a vizier he appointed the agent Abu Sahl al-Nawbakhti as governor of the Mubarik district of Wasit and Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Bazawfari as governor of the district of al-Sulh and al-Muzara'at in Wasit⁴¹. Simultaneously Muhsin b. al-Furat appointed the Baghdad agent al-Shalmaghani as deputy to certain governors in other districts⁴².

Participation in the administration enabled the agents to study the economic and political situation of the government and facilitated communications through their administrative positions.

Despite Ibn Ruh's great influence he seems to have been put in a critical situation by the militant activities of the other Shiites, particularly the Qaramita. These were used by his rivals as a pretext to cause his arrest. In 311/923 a caravan of Baghdadi pilgrims, including some relatives of the caliph al-Muqtadir, were attacked and captured by the Qaramita, an act which caused the people of Baghdad to be very upset.

Since the Qaramita were Shiites, this gave the enemies of the Shiites, like Nasr al-Hajib the chamberlain, an excellent weapon against the vizier Ibn al-Furat. Nasr claimed that because Ibn al-Furat was Shiite, he had encouraged the Qaramita to attack the pilgrims. Moreover, the masses were provoked to shout in public that Ibn al-Furat and his son Muhsin were the "greater Qarmati and the lesser Qarmati". In 312/924, as a result of these events Ibn al-Furat and his son were discharged and then murdered⁴³.

Al-Tusi reports that Ibn Ruh was arrested in 312/924, but does not give any reason for his imprisonment. Al-Dhahabi claims that his arrest was caused by the inflammatory propaganda against the Qaramita. He was accused of corresponding with the Qaramita in an effort to have them besiege Baghdad⁴⁴.

According to Ibn 'Arib, Ibn Ruh was arrested because he failed to hand over to the government the money which he owed it⁴⁵.

This reveals that some officials may have falsely accused Ibn Ruh of corresponding with the Qaramita in order to facilitate his arrest.. In any case, Ibn Ruh spent five years in jail until the caliph, al-Muqtadir, released him in 317/929.⁴⁶

Ibn Ruh recovered his previous respect and reputation, renewed his direct supervision over the Imamite activities, and once again received money from the Imamites. Many of his relatives, such as Ishaq b. Isma'ili (d. 322/933), Ali b. al- Abbas (d. 324/935) and al-Husayn b. Ali b. al- Abbas, had managed to maintain high offices in the Abbasid administration, so his influence increased.

Many influential officials and deposed viziers like 'Ali b. Muqla sought his acquaintance in order to pave the way for their advancement in the 'Abbasid administration⁴⁷.

For example, the vizier Ibn Muqla spent 20,000 dinars on estates and endowed them as *awqaf* for the Talibiyyin in 319/931.⁴⁸ But later he lost his office and therefore asked Ibn Ruh to help him. Ibn Ruh contacted his relative al-Husayn b. 'Ali b. al-'Abbas al-Nawbakhti, who was the secretary (*katib*) of *Amir al- Umara* , Ibn Ra'iq, and asked him to support Ibn Muqla in his efforts to recover his office, which were successful in 325/936.⁴⁹

At the same time that the third *Saf'ir* was wielding his powerful influence in official circles, he was faced with the serious deviation of his main deputy, al-Shalmaghani, who began to make claims outside Islamic beliefs.

4. The Third Saf'ir and al-Shalmaghani

Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Abi al-'Azaqir al-Shalmaghani, who was brought up in the village of Shalmaghan situated in the suburbs of Wasit, became one of the reciters (*qurra*) of the Qur'an in Wasit. Afterwards he moved to Baghdad where he joined the 'Abbasid administration, working as secretary (*katib*)⁵⁰.

He was also an Imamite scholar (*faqih*) and wrote eighteen works dealing with Shiite law and theology, among which is his book *al-Ghayba*. His writings were highly esteemed by the Imamites before his deviations⁵¹.

It has been noted that after the promotion of Ibn Ruh to the *sifara*, he appointed al-Shalmaghani to direct the activities of the Imamites in Baghdad, especially those of Banu Bistam, and those of the two agents of Kufa, al-Zajawzi and al-Zurari⁵².

Al-Shalmaghani continued directing the Imamites' activities in Baghdad and Kufa for many years. He was well-known for his impatient political ambitions, and he may have lost hope of gaining power in the near future by following the instructions of the Twelfth Imam to the letter. Therefore he decided to ignore the Twelfth Imam's instructions and started searching for other groups to achieve his political ambitions. According to Ibn Hawqal, al-Shalmaghani paid allegiance to the Isma'ili Mahdi⁵³.

However, Ibn Hawqal is the only narrator of this occurrence, and he gives neither the date of al-Shalmaghani's deviation, nor the reason he later abandoned his Isma'ili ties. It is most likely that he turned away from the Isma'ilis to the underground movement of the *Ghulat* because he found in their belief in the incarnation of God (hulul) in human form the best means to put his political and economic ambitions into action.

According to al-Shalmaghani's belief, throughout the course of history God has been incarnated in human form. In other words, God was incarnated first in the body of Adam and thereafter transmigrated to the bodies of the Prophets. After the Prophet Muhammad, He transmigrated to the bodies of the Imams until the time of the eleventh Imam, and then He appeared in the body of al-Shalmaghani himself. Simultaneously Allah had created His foe Iblis, who was also incarnated and who transmigrated throughout the course of history into a series of wicked human forms.

According to al-Shalmaghani, Allah's purpose in His incarnation and transmigration was to prove His existence and His excellence⁵⁴.

Al-Shalmaghani did not leave the Imamite organization immediately after his deviation nor did he announce the incarnation of God in his own body. Several reports suggest that he used his office as a deputy of the *Saf'ir*, Ibn Ruh, to train gradually the agents who were below him to accept his heretical teachings. The agent Muhammad b. Humam reports that he heard al-Shalmaghani saying, "The truth (God) is one, but His forms are several.

One day He takes on a white form, another day a red one, and on another a blue one." Ibn Humam reports, "This was the first statement which caused me to reject al-Shalmaghani, because this was the doctrine of the people of the incarnation of God (*al-Hululiyya*).⁵⁵"

According to another report al-Shalmaghani managed to persuade some agents together with their families, especially the agents of Banu Bistam, to accept the doctrine of the incarnation of God and the transmigration of souls. Afterwards he divulged to them that the soul of the Prophet had transmigrated into the body of the second *Saf'ir* Abu Ja'far, the soul of 'Ali b. Abi Talib had transmigrated into the body of the third *Saf'ir* Ibn Ruh, and the soul of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, had transmigrated into the body of Umm Kulthum, the second *Saf'ir's* daughter.

At the same time al-Shalmaghani told the sub-agents not to divulge this secret, because it was the true faith⁵⁶.

It appears that Ibn Ruh discovered the deviation of al-Shalmaghani through a female missionary, Umm Kulthum, who used to supervise the Imamite activities among the females of Banu Bistam. He ordered her to stop her relations and her secret meetings with them.

He told her that al-Shalmaghani had impressed his deviation so deeply on their hearts that they would even accept it if he were to claim that Allah Himself had become incarnated in his body; then he would follow in al-Hallaj's footsteps and claim that he was Allah⁵⁷.

The precise date of this incident is unknown. However, according to Ibn al-Athir the deviation of al-Shalmaghani began during the early time of the vizierate of Hamid b. al-'Abbas, between the years 306-311/918-923.⁵⁸ This is consistent with al-Tusi's report, which indicates that the deviation of al-Shalmaghani must have occurred before 312/924.⁵⁹

After discovering al-Shalmaghani's heretical ideas, Ibn Ruh discharged him from his office and caused knowledge of his heresy to become widespread, first among the people of Banu Nawbakht and then among others⁶⁰. Afterwards he ordered the agents to sever their relations with him.

It seems that the agent of Kufa, Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Zajawzi followed this order, because al-Tusi reports that he considered anyone possessing the book *al-Taklif* by al-Shalmaghani as extremist⁶¹.

But the agents of Banu Bistam in Baghdad refused Ibn Ruh's order and continued to receive instructions from al-Shalmaghani. For this reason Ibn Ruh disclosed al-Shalmaghani's situation to all the Imamites and excommunicated him along with all those who paid attention to him⁶².

Ibn Ruh's announcement reveals that a considerable body of the agents in Baghdad and the ordinary believers had been influenced by al-Shalmaghani. After his excommunication, he began propagating the idea that he and not Ibn Ruh was the rightful representative (*Saf'ir*) of the Twelfth Imam⁶³.

Through this claim and his belief in the incarnation of Allah in the bodies of the Prophets and the Imams, al-Shalmaghani tried to monopolize the economic and political positions of the organization. Later he even advanced the claim that Allah was present in his own body," and that *Iblis* was localized in the human form of the Twelfth Imam, since the latter was known as *al-Qa'im*.

Here al-Shalmaghani was claiming that *al-Qa'im* ("the one standing") meant *Iblis*, who had refused to prostrate himself before Adam when other angels had done so⁶⁴."

He also claimed that 'Ali b. Abi Talib was Allah, and that He had sent Muhammad to be His Prophet, but that the latter had betrayed Him. Therefore 'Ali gave Muhammad a period of truce lasting about 350 years, at the end of which Islamic law would be changed⁶⁵. Then the law would have a new interpretation, e.g. Paradise would be the acceptance of al-Shalmaghani's claim and allegiance to him, while Hell would be the rejection of his doctrine.

Moreover, he aimed at eliminating the main claimants to the caliphate, particularly the 'Alids and the

‘Abbasids, and considered himself the rightful claimant to all religious and political authority⁶⁶.

The political ambitions of al-Shalmaghani are obvious in his materialistic interpretation of the Qur'anic verses concerning Hell and Paradise to serve his own ambitions. These are especially apparent with reference to two points. Firstly, he fixed a date for the change of the Islamic Shari'a; 350/967. By this "prophecy" he was attempting to mobilise people to support him in his preparation for the "coming age".

Secondly he concentrated his propaganda among the high officials of the ‘Abbasid army and administration and gained a considerable number of followers, like Ahmad b. Muhammad b. ‘Abdus, Ibrahim b. Abi ‘Awn, the author of the book *al-Tashbihat*, Ibn Shabib al-Zayyat, Abu Ja’far b. Bistam and Abu ‘Ali b. Bistam, all of whom were secretaries (*kuttab*) of the state⁶⁷.

In 312/924 al-Muhsin b. al-Furat, the son of the vizier Ibn al-Furat, joined his side and enabled his followers to penetrate the ‘Abbasid administrative circles⁶⁸. Moreover, al-Husayn b. al-Qasim b. ‘Ubayd Allah b. Wahb, who held the vizierate between the years 319–20/9312, was one of the partisans of al-Shalmaghani⁶⁹.

It has already been noted that the third *Saf’ir* was imprisoned in 312/924. Al-Shalmaghani seized this opportunity to expand his activities among the Imamites, who had not yet received an answer from the Imam himself concerning the claims of al-Shalmaghani. Therefore the Imam sent via Ibn Ruh this pronouncement concerning his attitude towards the claims of al-Shalmaghani:

... Muhammad b. ‘Ali, known as al-Shalmaghani, is one of those upon whom Allah has hastened His judgement and to whom He has granted no respite. He has deviated from Islam and separated himself from it. He has become an apostate from the religion of Allah, making claims which indicate the denial of Allah, the Most Glorious and High, fabricating lies and falsehoods, and pronouncing untruths and great transgressions. Those who associate another with Allah are in far error and clearly suffer great loss.

For indeed we declare ourselves free (of any relationship with al-Shalmaghani) before Allah, may He be exalted, and His messenger and his family, may the blessings of Allah, His peace, His mercy and His benediction be upon them according to His benevolence; while we curse him (i.e. al-Shalmaghani), may the curses of Allah be showered successively (upon him) externally and internally, secretly and publicly, at every time and in every circumstance.

And (may the curse of Allah be) upon those who agree with him and follow him, and also upon those who, having heard our announcement, continue to pay allegiance to him.

So inform them (the Imamite agents) that we shall guard and take precautions against him, as was the case with those who preceded him and held similar views, like al-Shari'i, al-Numayri, al-Hilali, al-Bilali and so forth. For the traditions of Allah are conformable to us. In Him we place our trust, and from Him we seek assistance. He is sufficient for us in all our affairs and is the best of Guardians.⁷⁰

According to al-Tusi the agent Muhammad b. Humam received this pronouncement from Ibn Ruh while he was in prison. He spread it personally among all the agents in Baghdad and sent it to the agents in the other cities until it became well-known among the ordinary Imamites⁷¹.

According to Ibn al-Athir, Ibn Ruh disclosed al-Shalmaghani's claim even to the 'Abbasids. As a result in 313/925 the vizier al-Khaqani tried to arrest him⁷², an attempt which brought about the imprisonment of many people who had inclined towards him⁷³.

However he disappeared and escaped to Mosul, where he took refuge from the ruler Nasir al-Dawla al-Hasan b. 'Abd Allah b. Hamdan. He lived there in a village called Ma'althaya in the vicinity of Mosul. However, he did not break off communication with his followers in Baghdad⁷⁴.

According to al-Najashi, during his concealment in the village of Ma'althaya, al-Shalmaghani narrated his books to a certain Abu 'Abd Allah al-Shaybani. He was an Imamite *Muhaddith* who lived in the Nawbakhtiyya district of Baghdad," but he later turned away from the Imamite school⁷⁵.

In 316/928 al-Shaybani returned secretly to Baghdad⁷⁶ in order to be in direct contact with his followers, whose activities had spread widely among the officials of the Abbasid administration, a development which can possibly be regarded as a step toward his objective of obtaining power.

Al-Husayn b. al-Qasim b. 'Ubayd Allah b. Wahb, the partisan of al-Shalmaghani, was promoted to the vizierate in 319/931 and his name was stamped on the coin beside the name of the caliph al-Muqtadir⁷⁷.

As a vizier Ibn Wahb enabled his partisans to assume high positions, but after a year he was discharged. Later the new caliph al-Qahir (320-322/932-934) exiled him to al-Riqqah in Syria because of his allegiance to al-Shalmaghani. He also arrested his comrades, especially the Banu Bistam, and seized their property⁷⁸.

This campaign continued until al-Shalmaghani himself was arrested in 323/934. Along with a few of the leading personalities of his movement, like Ibn Abi 'Awn, he was tortured and executed, and the corpses were burnt at the police headquarters (*Dar al-Shurta*) on the western side of Baghdad⁷⁹.

Ibn Ruh's influence and authority among the 'Abbasids increased after the persecution of al-Shalmaghani, who was their common enemy. Thus Ibn Ruh recovered his high influence and became close to the caliph al-Radi (322-29/934-40).

Moreover it appears that Ibn Ruh's cooperation with the 'Abbasids against al-Shalmaghani led the caliph al-Radi to think that his activities with the Imamites had no connection with the Twelfth Imam and would probably cease in the near future. Al-Suli reports:

Al-Radi sometimes mentioned that the Imamites used to hand the *khums* (*al-amwal*) over to Ibn Ruh but we refuted this accusation, and claimed that it was a lie. So he said to us, "What is wrong with that?"

By Allah, I wish that there were a thousand people like him to whom the Imamites might bring their possessions so that Allah might impoverish them. I do not mind if they (Ibn Ruh and others) become rich through receiving their possessions (i.e. those of the Imamites).⁸⁰"

Ibn Ruh died on the 18th of Sha'ban 326/20 June 938, and was buried in al-Nawbakhtiyya district⁸¹ in the western side of Baghdad⁸². He was succeeded by Abu al-Hasan 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Sammar⁸³.

- ¹. Ibn Sahr Ashub, *Manaqib*, I, 458.
- ². Ikhtiyar, 557. The work of Ibn Abi Tayy is not extant, but al-Dhahabi used it in writing al-Nawbakhti's biography; al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam*, f. 132.
- ³. T. al-Ghayba, 209–10; Iqbal, *Khandan Nawbakhti*, 214.
- ⁴. T. al-Ghayba, 252–253.
- ⁵. T. al-Ghayba, 250–252.
- ⁶. T. al-Ghayba, 242–3; Bihar, LI, 355.
- ⁷. The narrator of this report is Abu Ghalib al-Zurari. He reports that he used to contact the second Safi'r via al-Nawbakhti, who when he became the third Safi'r, contacted the agents of Kufa through al-Shalmaghani; T. al-Ghayba, 202.
- ⁸. T. al-Ghayba, 242.
- ⁹. *Kama'l*, 505–6.
- ¹⁰. The testament of the second safi'r to Ibn Ruh al-Nawbakhti was reported on the authority of the agents, Muhammad b. Humam and Ja'far b. Ahmad b. Matil, who were present at that meeting and bore witness to the designation. Moreover Ibn Barina, the grandson of the second Safi'r, also reports the testament and agrees with the other agents in regard to its authenticity. *Kama'l*, 503.
- ¹¹. T. al-Ghayba, 242–3.
- ¹². T. al-Ghayba, 240.
- ¹³. T. al-Ghayba, 255.
- ¹⁴. Sachedina, *The Doctrine of Mahdism in Imami Shi'ism* (Ph.D.) Thesis, Toronto University (Canada, 1976), 137.
- ¹⁵. al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam*, f. 132.
- ¹⁶. T. al-Ghayba, 240. According to some reports, the decision that Ibn Ruh would be the successor of Abu Ja'far had already been revealed by Abu Ja'far himself to a few agents three years before his death in 305/917. Ja'far al-Mada'ini and Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Aswad were amongst the agents who received these instructions. *Kama'l*, 501–2.
- ¹⁷. T. al-Ghayba, 256.
- ¹⁸. al-Dhahabi, *Tarikh al-Islam*, f. 132 b.
- ¹⁹. T. al-Ghayba, 250–1.
- ²⁰. For a full account of the career of Hamid b. al-'Abbas, see al-Kubaysi, *op. cit.*, 190–9.
- ²¹. Bihar, LI, 320–1; T. al-Ghayba, 212, 242–3.
- ²². Iqbal, *op. cit.*, 216.
- ²³. Bihar, LI, 371; T. al-Ghayba, 263.
- ²⁴. T. al-Ghayba, 197–8, 212.
- ²⁵. al-Najashi, 293–4; Buzurg, *Nawabigh al-Ruwat*, 289.
- ²⁶. T. al-Ghayba, 205–6; Buzurg, *Nawabigh al-Ruwat*, 96.
- ²⁷. *Kama'l*, 504.
- ²⁸. T. al-Ghayba, 240.
- ²⁹. T. al-Ghayba, 176, 179–80.
- ³⁰. *Kama'l*, 443–4.
- ³¹. T. al-Ghayba, 255.
- ³². T. al-Ghayba, 202–5. According to Buzurg, al-Qasim died in 304/916. But al-Tusi refers to his activities during the time of the third Safi'r (305–26/917–37), so his death must have occurred after 304/916; T. al-Ghayba, 202.
- ³³. al-Najashi, 289.

- [34.](#) Kama'l, 502.
- [35.](#) Kama'l, 516– 517.
- [36.](#) Kama'l, 518–9.
- [37.](#) al-Jahshayari, al-Wuzara', 300
- [38.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 199.
- [39.](#) Iqbal, op. cit., 217.
- [40.](#) Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al-A'yan (Cairo, 1948), III, 99.
- [41.](#) al-Sabi, op. cit., 40– 1.
- [42.](#) Ibn Miskawayh, op. cit., I, 123.
- [43.](#) Ibn Miskawayh, op. cit., I, 120–7.
- [44.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 200; al-Dhahabi, Tarikh al-Islam, f. 132a.
- [45.](#) 'Arib, op. cit., 141.
- [46.](#) 'Arib, op. cit., 141; T. al-Ghayba, 200.
- [47.](#) Iqbal, op. cit., 220
- [48.](#) Ibn Miskawayh, op. cit., I, 225.
- [49.](#) al-Suli, al-Awraq, 87.
- [50.](#) Ibn al-Athir, al-Lubab, II, 27; Yaqut, Irshad al-Arib, I, 296; Mujam al-Buldan, V, 288.
- [51.](#) al-Najashi, 293–4; T. al-Fihrist, 305–6; T. al-Ghayba, 158, 221, 267. It seems that the extant work called Fiqh al-Rifa'a is in fact Kitab al-Taklif of al-Shalmaghani because it has a tradition concerning testimony (al-Shahada) and another concerning the definition of the measure called kurr which al-Shalmaghani gave in contrast to the other Imamites.
- [52.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 212, 263.
- [53.](#) Ibn Hawqal, op. cit., 211.
- [54.](#) Yaqut, Irshad al-Arib, I, 301–3, al-Kamil, VIII, 218–9.
- [55.](#) Bihar, LI, 374; Hashim al-Hasani, op. cit., II, 575.
- [56.](#) Bihar, LI, 372; al-Sadr, op. cit., I, 516.
- [57.](#) Such a claim obviously contradicts the beliefs of both the Shia and the Sunni alike. For details of God's essential nature according to the Imamites, see al-Hilli, al-Hasan b. Yusuf, Anwar al-Malakut fi Sharh al-Yaqut (Teheran, 1338), 77–85, and his al-Bab al-Hadi Ashar, A Treatise on the principles of Shiite theology, trans. from Arabic from W. Miller (London 1958), 15–52
- [58.](#) al-Kamil, VIII, 218–9.
- [59.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 268.
- [60.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 265.
- [61.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 253–4.
- [62.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 2564.
- [63.](#) al-Kamil, VIII, 218.
- [64.](#) Yaqut, Irshad al-Arib, I, 302; Ibn al-Athir, al-Lubab, II, 27
- [65.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 266.
- [66.](#) Yaqut, Irshad al-Arib, I, 302–3; al-Shibi, op. cit., 203.
- [67.](#) al-Dhahabi, al-Ibar, II, 191.
- [68.](#) Ibn Miskawayh, op. cit., I, 123.
- [69.](#) Yaqut, Irshad al-Arib, I, 303.
- [70.](#) al-Sadr, op. cit., 517–8.
- [71.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 269.
- [72.](#) al-Kamil, VIII, 217.
- [73.](#) Yaqut, Irshad al-Arib, I, 299.
- [74.](#) al-Najashi, 289, 294.
- [75.](#) Al-Shaybani seems to have been an Imamite Muhaddith but after the deviation of al-Shalmaghani he inclined toward him, ignoring the Twelfth Imam's pronouncement against him; T. al-Fihrist; 299; al-Najashi, 309.

[76.](#) al-Sadr, op. cit., I, 527; Hashim al-Hasani, op. cit., II, 575.

[77.](#) Ibn Miskawayh, op. cit., I, 215–7, 223.

[78.](#) Ibn Miskawayh, I, 267.

[79.](#) al-Mas'udi, al-Tanbih, 343; Yaqut, Irshad al-Arib, I, 299–304.

[80.](#) al-Sufi, op. cit., 104.

[81.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 252.

[82.](#) At the present time the grave of Ibn Ruh is situated on the eastern side of Baghdad, whereas al-Tusi mentions that this grave was in the Nawbakhtiyya district at the avenue which leads to Qantar al-Shawk, which was located in the western side of Baghdad; Yaqut, Mujam al-Buldan, IV, 191; al-'Amid, op. cit., 70.

[83.](#) Kama'l, 517.

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