

The Imamites' Views concerning the Concealed Imam and His Birth

1. The Schisms Amongst the Adherents of al-Hasan al-'Askari After His Death.

A) Introduction

The Imamate during the life of the last six Imams of the Twelver Imamites (*al-Imamiyya al-lthna 'ashariyya*) was distinguished by the many splits which occurred after the death of each Imam, who was considered by the Imamites as one of the twelve Imams, over the recognition of his successor. In spite of these repeated schisms, after a hard struggle each Imam was able to maintain the obedience of the majority of the followers of the previous Imam¹.

Al-Hasan b. 'Ali al-'Askari was born in 232/845 and died in 260/874. According to some later Shi'ite sources, he was poisoned through the instigation of the 'Abbasid caliph, al-Mu'tamid².

During the six years of his Imamate, al-'Askari lived in hiding and prudent fear because of the restrictions imposed upon him by his being surrounded by the spies of al-Mu'tamid. This was the reason for his lack of open contact with the mass of his followers. Only the elite of his adherents were able to communicate with him personally³.

The same sources report that in the year 260/874 the eleventh Imam became ill. As soon as news of his sickness reached al-Mu'tamid, he dispatched five of his special servants to al-'Askari house, ordering them to keep close watch on him.

Thereafter the caliph sent physicians and the *Qadi al-Qudat* in the company of ten men whom he considered trustworthy, to al-'Askari's house to remain with him and observe his condition and the situation within his home at all times. Al-'Askari's malady became worse and he passed away on 8th

Rabi' I 260/1st January 874.

Al-Mu'tamid dispatched Abu 'Isa b. al-Mutawakkil to say the prayer for the dead over the body of al-'Askari. After this rite was completed al-'Askari was buried within the confines of his house in *Sirr Man Ra'a* (Samarra), next to his father⁴.

According to the early Imamite sources al-'Askari did not leave a publicly acknowledged son, nor did he determine upon or install his successor openly⁵. As al-Mufid says, the Imamites were suffering oppression at the hand of the 'Abbasids, while the caliph, al-Mu'tamid, was searching for al-'Askari's son and trying to arrest him by any means possible.

Moreover, the views of the Imamite Shi'a about him were being circulated, and it was becoming known that they were waiting for him to rise. For this reason al-'Askari had not revealed his son during his lifetime, not even to the greater portion of his own adherents⁶.

Because the Imamites were distinguished from other Islamic denominations by the principle of the designation of the Imam by his predecessor they seem to have found themselves in a critical situation after their Imam's death, since he had not designated his successor openly. Therefore the Imamite jurists had recourse to the traditions of the Prophet and his progeny to determine who was to be the Twelfth Imam.

They found many traditions to support their various claims. Amongst them were transmissions which stated that an Imam could not die without seeing his offspring who would succeed him; that the world cannot be without a Proof⁷; that the Imamate cannot pass to two brothers after al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and that it will be occupied by one of the progeny of 'Ali b. al-Husayn⁸; that the Imam knows who will succeed him and does not die until he gives his testament to his successor⁹; and that the Imamate should belong to the eldest son of the preceding Imam¹⁰.

These traditions seem to have been adopted by the greater portion of the Imamites, and their interpretation of these traditions led to various viewpoints, which in turn led to new divisions amongst the Imamites.

Sa'd al-Qummi counted fifteen schisms, whereas al-Nawbakhti and al-Mufid enumerated them as fourteen. Al-Mas'udi thinks that there were twenty sects, while al-Shahristani counts only eleven¹¹. Nevertheless a study of the claims of these factions reveals that there were apparently only five major schisms.

However, each of these became further split over the theological and traditional arguments employed to support their claims. At any rate it seems important to set down the major claims of these schisms in order to achieve a clear conception of the Imamites at that time.

B) Schism I: the Waqifa at al-'Askari

What brought the people of this faction together was their claim that the eleventh Imam, al-'Askari, was *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* although they differed as to how he became *al-Qa'im*.

i) The first faction of this schism deemed that al-'Askari had not died, but had gone into occultation¹². They based their assumption on the traditions reported from the previous Imams, which said that an Imam could not die without having a publicly acknowledged son to succeed him, because the world cannot be without a Proof¹³.

While the people were not obliged to accept the Imamate of those who were now laying claim to it, they should acknowledge the Imamate of al-'Askari whose Imamate had been confirmed by the testament of the former Imam. They also maintained that they had a tradition which said that *al-Qa'im* had two occultations.

Therefore, since al-'Askari had not left a publicly acknowledged son and since the earth cannot remain for an hour without a Proof, it was right to claim that he had not died but was hidden, and that he was truly *al-Qa'im*.

This was his first occultation, after which he would rise again. Then, when his rising became known, he would conceal himself once more in his second occultation¹⁴.

In their discussions with their opponents, they tried to distinguish themselves from the Imamites who had stopped at the seventh Imam, Musa al-Kazim (183/799), claiming he was *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*, by faulting them for stopping at al-Kazim. They pointed out that he had died and left his successor, 'Ali al-Riḡa (202/817) as well as other sons, while al-'Askari had obviously passed away and left no heir¹⁵.

ii) The second faction of the *Waqifa* at al-'Askari believed that he had died, but was then raised to life, and was *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*. Basically, the members of this faction established their doctrine on a transmission from Imam Ja'far al-Sa'diq, who said that *al-Qa'im* was called *al-Qa'im* because he would "rise" again after his death. They stated that it was certain that al-'Askari had died without leaving a successor and without designating anyone as his legatee.

Thus there was no doubt about his being *al-Qa'im*, nor about his being alive after death, although he concealed himself for fear of his foes. They supported their theories with a saying of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib, contained in his advice to his follower Kumayl b. Ziyad, "O Allah, indeed You do not leave the earth without a *Qaim* with proof from You, whether manifest or hidden, for then Your proofs and Your signs would be invalidated."¹⁶

On the basis of 'Ali's words they concluded that al-'Askari was absent and hidden, but that he would rise to fill the earth with peace and justice after it had been filled with tyranny¹⁷.

iii) *Al-Waqifa al-la Adriyya* also stopped at al-'Askari. They deemed that he had died and had been the Imam. Although the earth could not be without a Proof from Allah, they were not sure who had succeeded al-'Askari, his son or his brother. Therefore they stopped at the Imamate of al-'Askari, and decided to make no decision until the matter became clear to them¹⁸.

Unfortunately, the contemporary sources do not mention anyone as representing the three factions of *al-Waqifa* at al-'Askari. However, from the doctrine of the first faction of the *Waqifa*, it seems that its partisans lived in places which were far from Samarra, the city of the Imam. Since they were not present at the moment of his death, they tended to believe that he had not in fact died, but was *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*.

C) Schism II: The Ja'farites

The representatives of this schism claimed that the Imam after al-'Askari was his youngest brother, Ja'far, but they differed as to how the Imamate had passed on to him, and therefore split into four factions.

i) The first faction believed that al-'Askari had died and that he had held the Imamate by the testament of his father. Since the Imamate can only pass to the eldest living son of the former Imam, the Imamate passed from 'Ali al-Hadi not to his eldest son Muhammad, who had died before him, but to al-'Askari, who was the elder of the two sons who had outlived their father¹⁹.

This faction believed that al-'Askari had not left a publicly acknowledged son to take over the Imamate and, therefore, his sole remaining brother, Ja'far, was the Imam. In order to support their dogma they were obliged to repeat the Fathiyya's²⁰ arguments about the Imamate. The latter claimed that Musa al-Kazim received the Imamate, not from his father Ja'far al-Sadiq, but from his eldest brother 'Abd Allah, according to the tradition which says that the Imamate passes on to the eldest son of the Imam when he dies.

Like the Fathiyya, this faction of the Ja'farites accepted the authenticity of the tradition which says that the Imamate will not fall to two brothers after al-Hasan and al-Husayn. But they maintained that this could only be applied if al-'Askari had left a son. Since al-'Askari had passed away without leaving a publicly acknowledged successor, his brother Ja'far was the designated Imam²¹ and the Imamate would pass on in his offspring.

They also recognised 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far al-Sadiq as the seventh Imam. Consequently Ja'far was thirteenth in the chain of Imams.

ii) The second faction of the Ja'farites contended that the eleventh Imam had himself designated Ja'far as his successor according to the principle of *al-Bada'*²². The same thing had happened in the case of Ism'a'il, the eldest son of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. God had clarified His ultimate decision concerning him by taking away his soul and placing his brothers 'Abd Allah and Musa consecutively in the Imamate instead.

Similarly, in the case of Ja'far b. 'Ali, God had entrusted al-'Askari with the Imamate, but thereafter He had made it clear that the Imamate should not pass on in the progeny of al-'Askari. Therefore He transferred it to his brother Ja'far, who was the Imam after al-'Askari's death. Like the previous factions, this faction used the argument and dogma of the Fathiyya to support their viewpoint.

This sect was probably more popular than the first among the theologians, especially in Kufa. Its leader was a Kufi theologian called 'Ali b. Tahl or al-Talhi al-Khazzaz, who had been famous amongst the surviving members of the Fathiyya for his skill in theological discussions. He upheld Ja'far's Imamate and encouraged people to take his side. He was supported in his propaganda by the sister of Faris. b. Hatim b. Mahawiyya al-Qazwini, although she rejected the Imamate of al-'Askari and claimed that the Imamate had been transferred to Ja'far from his father, 'Ali al-Hadi²³.

She may have had this claim because her brother, Faris b. Hatim, was killed on the order of al-'Askari²⁴. It is also possible that the Kufan scholastic family Banu Faddal, who were active supporters of the Fathiyya, adopted the doctrine of this faction, especially Ahmad b. al-Hasan b. 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Faddal, who died in 260/874, and his brother 'Ali.

iii) The members of this faction claimed that the Imamate had passed on to Ja'far through the designation of his father. They based their doctrine on a tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq, which states that the Imamate cannot be held by two brothers after al-Hasan and al-Husayn²⁵. Since Muhammad, the eldest son of 'Ali al-Hadi, died during the lifetime of his father, and since the Imamate should belong to those who survive the death of their father, it had not been transferred to Muhammad.

They may have accepted the Imamate of al-'Askari because he was the eldest son after the death of his father, but they rejected his Imamate after his death, because he had passed away without leaving a publicly acknowledged son as his successor. It was a matter of course to them, they said, that the Imam could not die without leaving a publicly acknowledged and well known successor, designated by him and entrusted with the Imamate.

Therefore the claim of al-'Askari to the Imamate must be invalid. So it was inevitable that the Imam was Ja'far, by the designation of his father²⁶.

It is worth mentioning that this faction existed within the lifetime of al-'Askari. When the tenth Imam died in 254/868 the majority of his followers accepted the Imamate of his eldest surviving son, al-'Askari, as confirmed by the testament of his father, but a minority took Ja'far's side²⁷. He became more powerful after al-'Askari's death, since some of al-'Askari's adherents abandoned his Imamate and accepted that of Ja'far. A leading scholar of this faction was 'Ali b. Ahmad b. Bashshar, who wrote a book on the *Ghayba* and disputed fiercely with his opponents²⁸.

There is some evidence that this faction achieved a certain degree of success by persuading a few of the people who had accepted al-'Askari's Imamate to join their side. Al-Saduq and al-Majlisi report a letter attributed to the Twelfth Imam, and sent to his agent, 'Uthman b. Sa'id al-'Umari. This letter

reveals that an adherent of this faction argued with a Twelver called al-Mukhtar, and succeeded in making him accept the Imamate of Ja'far²⁹. The sister of Faris b. Hatim, who was mentioned above, was one of the partisans of this group.

iv) The followers of this faction were called al-Nafisiyya. They believed that the tenth Imam had designated his eldest son Muhammad as his legatee. Then, according to the principle of *Bada'*, Allah took away his life while his father was still alive.

But when Muhammad b. 'Ali passed away, by the order of his father, he designated his brother Ja'far as his successor. He entrusted his testament, the books, the secret knowledge and the weapons needed by the community to his trustworthy young slave called Nafis. And he ordered him to hand them over to his brother Ja'far when his father died.

However, when Muhammad died, the adherents of al-'Askari discovered the secret arrangement and the role of Nafis. Since Nafis was afraid of them and feared that the Imamate might be cut short, he called Ja'far and handed over the trust of Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Hadi. Ja'far himself claimed that the Imamate had been passed to him from his brother, Muhammad³⁰.

The members of this faction denied the testament of al-Hasan al-'Askari, because his father, they claimed, had neither designated him nor changed his testament from Muhammad. Nafis was killed by being drowned in a well³¹.

D) Schism III: The Muhammadiyya

This sect denied the Imamate of Ja'far and al-'Askari and considered Muhammad, who had died in the lifetime of his father, as their Imam. They argued that 'Ali al-Hadi, the tenth Imam, had neither designated nor indicated either al-'Askari or Ja'far as his legatee. Therefore neither of them had any right to make claims upon the Imamate.

Since the Imam could not die without leaving a successor, and since al-'Askari had passed away and not left a publicly acknowledged or well-known son, his Imamate was invalidated. Ja'far, they added, was not worthy of putting forward a claim because his immorality and sinfulness were infamous. His wicked character could not be prudent fear (*Taqiyya*) in the face of his enemies, for *Taqiyya* cannot be practiced by committing sins.

They concluded that since it was forbidden for the Imamate to be nullified, they were obliged to return to the Imamate of Muhammad b. 'Ali, since he had left offspring and his acts were distinguished by probity and virtue³². Others of them even considered him as *al-Qaim al-Mahdi*³³ and some of them went as far as to deny his death³⁴.

E) Schism IV: The Qat'iyya

This faction constituted the greater portion of the Imamites. They believed that al-'Askari had died and left a son to succeed him, but they differed about the day of his birth, his name, and whether or not he was *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*. For this reason they split into six groups:

i) The first group maintained that al-'Askari had died and left a son called Muhammad. According to Sa'd al-Qummi, they held that his son had come of age, while, according to al-Nawbakhti and al-Shahristani, they believed that he had been born two years before his father's death. He was the Imam because his father had designated him so, and because it was well-known that al-'Askari had left no other son. So inevitably he was the Imam and *al-Qa'im*.

But due to fear of his uncle, Ja'far, he went into concealment and this became one of his occultations. This group built their doctrine on a tradition attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq, which says that *al-Qa'im's* date of birth is hidden from the people, information concerning him is obscure, and the people cannot know him³⁵.

Unfortunately little is known about this faction, but al-Saduq, while trying to prove the birth of the Twelfth Imam, mentions traditions which are presumably attributed to this faction's adherents. One of these was called Ya'qub b. Manfush, who claimed that he had visited al-'Askari and asked him about his successor. Al-'Askari showed him his son, who was between eight and ten years old, indicating that his son would succeed him. Another was called Daw' b. Ali al-'Ijli, who maintained that he had met al-'Askari in his house where he saw his son, who was then two years old³⁶.

ii) The members of this group held the same dogma as the previous faction. They agreed with them on the death of al-'Askari, but they thought that he had left a successor whose name was not Muhammad but 'Ali. They said that al-'Askari had no son except 'Ali, who had been seen by his father's trustworthy followers. According to Sa'd al-Qummi this sect had few adherents and they were concentrated within the suburbs of the Sawad of Kufa³⁷.

iii) This sect held that the Imam after al-'Askari was his son, who had been born eight months after his father's death and had then gone into concealment. They argued that those who claimed that a son was born to him during his lifetime were making false statements, because al-'Askari had died without leaving a publicly acknowledged son.

But the pregnancy had been known to the caliph as well as other people, and for this reason the caliph delayed dividing his share in the state until the pregnancy was proved invalid. In fact, they said, the son was born eight months after the death of his father and was ridden, and his father had ordered that he be called Muhammad.

They based their doctrine on a tradition attributed to the eighth Imam, 'Ali b. Musa al-Riḡa, which says, "*You would test the foetus which is within the womb of his mother, and the suckling child.*"³⁸

iv) The partisans of this faction held that al-‘Askari had no sons at all. The arguments about a hidden son, who was born during the lifetime of al- ‘Askari, were rejected by them, because they had searched for him during the life of the eleventh Imam using various means, but had failed to find him.

But since the Imam cannot die without leaving an heir, they claimed that a slave girl had conceived a child belonging to al- ‘Askari, and that when she gave birth to him he would be the Imam, even if, as they are reported to have said by al-Mufid, the pregnancy should last a hundred years. They established their doctrine on a tradition of al-Sadiq, which states that *al-Qa’im* is he whose conception and date of birth are hidden from the people³⁹.

v) This faction held that the Imam after al- ‘Askari was his son Muhammad, who was the Awaited One (*al-Muntazar*). They claimed that he had died but would rise to life with the sword to fill the earth with peace and justice after it had been filled with tyranny and injustice⁴⁰.

This group is mentioned neither by Sa’d al-Qummi nor by al-Nawbakhti. Presumably the latter dealt with it but this discussion was later dropped from his work, since al-Mufid who based his information on al-Nawbakhti's work, mentions this group in *al’Uyun wa-l-Mahasin*⁴¹.

vi) This group, entitled the *Imamiyya* by Sa’d al-Qummi and al-Nawbakhti, held that al- ‘Askari had died and that inevitably Allah's *Hujja* on earth was his son. He was his sole successor and legatee, charged with the affairs of the Imamate after him in accordance with the method laid down by previous tradition. Thus the Imamate should pass on to his offspring until the Day of Resurrection, but he was absent and hidden by an order.

It was prohibited to seek him out before he chose to manifest himself, because his adherents would endanger his life and thier own if they looked for him. In spite of his occultation a few reliable followers could contact him⁴². He was born on 15th Sha'ban 256/29th July 868.⁴³

Basically this group directed their arguments against those factions which supported the Imamate of Muhammad and Ja’far. With the partisans of Muhammad they argued that the Imamate could be held neither by the descendants of Muhammad, who had died during his father's lifetime, nor by his legatee, such as his brother or someone else, because there was no evidence or proof for accepting the Imamate of a son who had died before his father. Perhaps this argument was also directed against the Nafisiyya.

Presumably with the Jac farites they argued that the Imamate could not pass from brother to brother after al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and that the Imamate should fall to the eldest son of the preceding Imam. The eleventh Imam al- ‘Askari, was designated by the testament of his father, so the Imamate had to pass to his offspring⁴⁴. They also said tht it was improper for the faithful to select an Imam for themselves. Allah had to choose him and to manifest him at the proper time⁴⁵.

This faction constituted the majority of the Imamites who had accepted the Imamate of al- ‘Askari, such as Abu Sahl Isma’il b. ‘Ali al-Nawbakhti, al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti, Sa’d b. ‘Abd Allah al-Ash’ari

al-Qummi (the author of *Kitab al-Maqalat wa-l-Firaq*), 'Uthman b. Said al-Umari and his son Muhammad⁴⁶.

F) Schism V: The Cessation of the Imamate

This group held that from the moment al-'Askari died there was no longer an Imam. Al-Nawbakhti, al-Mufid and al-Shahristani considered this group as one faction, whereas Sa'd al-Qummi was presumably more accurate when he divided it into two⁴⁷, since the partisans of this schism agreed on the death of al-'Askari and the cessation of the Imamate, while they differed on the dogma of *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* as follows:

i) The first group deemed that it had been confirmed by successive transmission that al-'Askari would die without leaving a successor. For this reason there was no Imam after al-'Askari and the Imamate ceased. This, they contended, was reasonable and permitted. Since the cessation of the prophecy after Muhammad was possible, the cessation of the Imamate was also possible.

They established their doctrine on a transmission attributed to the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, which states that the earth cannot be without a Proof unless Allah becomes angry at the sins of His creatures and retains him from them for as long as He wills. This group did not believe in the rising of *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*⁴⁸.

ii) The people of the second group held the same doctrine as the previous faction, but they separated from them over the dogma of *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*. They said that since al-'Askari had passed away without leaving a successor, the Imamate had ceased until Allah raised the Qa'im from among the Imams who had died, such as al-Hasan al-'Askari, or from among any of his descendants.

Furthermore the rising of *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* was inevitable because this was confirmed by successive tradition. They considered the period after the death of al-'Askari and the rise of *al-Qa'im* as an interval of time devoid of prophecy and Imamate, like the period between Jesus and Muhammad⁴⁹.

There is some evidence that many people from various countries doubted the existence of the Twelfth Imam, such as Muhammad b. Ali b. Mahzayar al-Ahwazi from al-Ahwaz⁵⁰, and many of the persons from Banu Taalib in Medina who had been agents of the eleventh Imam⁵¹.

G) Conclusion

This historical and theological survey suggests that on the death of al-'Askari, the Imamites fell into problems similar to those which had beset them after the death of the seventh Imam, Musa al-Kazim. They split into *al-Waqifa*, *Muhammadiyah*, *Ja'fariyya* and *Qat'iyya*. Possibly the causes of this split were as follows:

i) Although the bulk of the Imamites accepted the Imamate of al-'Askari, they retained their cultural and

sectarian backgrounds. For example, al-Askari himself had allowed his adherents to accept the traditions related by the Banu Faddal, who belong to the *Waqifa* Musa al-Kazim, but had urged them to reject their doctrine.

The influence exerted by these cultural ties can be noted in the traditional arguments held by the Imamites after the death of al-Askari, arguments which led to the rise of the *Waqifa* at al-Askari and the encouragement of the Ja'farites.

ii) Despite its developed system the Imamite organization (*al-Wikala*) did not widely disseminate the testament of Imam al-Askari concerning his successor amongst the populace and the lower missionaries. The organization may have acted in this way because of the tense political situation. Thus no successor was openly indicated by al-Askari, nor was any well-known to the general mass of the Imamites.

For this reason the Imamites who knew nothing about al-Askari's testament had recourse to the traditions adopted by the majority of the Imamites to determine who was to be the Twelfth Imam. The interpretation of these traditions led to various different points of view which, in turn, led to new subdivisions amongst the Qat'iyya and the *Muhammadiyya*.

iii) The third cause contributing to these divisions was the personal ambition of al-Askari's brother, Ja'far, who claimed the Imamate during the lifetime of al-Askari. Ja'far became more powerful after the death of his brother, because he was encouraged by the Fathiyya, in order to vindicate their doctrine, and especially by Banu Faddal in Kufa. However Ja'far's success did not continue, because his followers differed as to how he gained the Imamate, and because their arguments in the field of traditions were weaker than those of the Qat'iyya.

Thus, as al-Mufid and al-Tusi state, all these divisions and splits gradually vanished, except for the *Qat'iyya*, who became the Twelvers in the fourth/tenth century⁵².

2. The Question of the Birth of the Twelfth Imam

The possibility that the Twelfth Imam was born and his birth was kept hidden is supported by a number of narrations. The fact that there were already narrations about the Twelfth Imam as *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* gave rise to other narrations which can only be described as hagiographical. But from the time of al-Saduq onwards, even these were accepted by the Imamites as historical facts.

Nevertheless, other early narrations present his birth as a purely historical fact without the embellishment of miraculous reports.

A) The Origin of the Mother of the Twelfth Imam

The earliest Imamite scholar to give an account of the Twelfth Imam's mother is al-Mas'udi. He reports that she was a slave-girl called Narjis⁵³. Al-Shahid (d. 786/1384) states that her name was Maryam b.

Zayd al-'Alawiyya⁵⁴, and other reports give her name as Rayhana, Saqil and Sawsan.^{ss} It is possible that her name was in fact Narjis and the other names, except Saqil, were given to her by her owner Hakima bint Muhammad al-Jawad. People at that time used to call their slave-girls by different names as a form of flattery, and Narjis, Rayhana and Sawsan are all names of flowers.

The earliest report concerning the nationality of the Twelfth Imam's mother goes back to the year 286/899. This was written down for the first time by al-Saduq, on the authority of Muhammad b. Bahr al-Shaybani, who attributed his narration to Bishr b. Sulayman al-Nakhkhas. According to this report she was a Christian from Byzantium who had been captured by Islamic troops⁵⁵.

She was sold as a slave and bought by al-Nakhkhas in the slave-market in Baghdad. Al-Nakhkhas sent her to the tenth Imam, 'Ali al-Hadi, in Samarra. After this, however, the narration begins to lose much of its credibility and becomes hagiographical. It is related that she was Malika b. Yashshu', the granddaughter of the Emperor of Byzantium, whose mother was a descendant of Simon (Sham'un) the disciple of Jesus.

When Malika was in her grandfather's palace, she dreamt that she saw Jesus's mother, Mary, and Muhammad's daughter, Fatima. In this dream Fattima converts her to Islam and persuades her to allow herself to be captured by Islamic troops⁵⁶.

The authenticity of this narration is questionable in many aspects, the most doubtful points being found in the last part.

Firstly there was no major battle between the 'Abbasids and the Byzantines after 242/856⁵⁷ and there is no indication in the sources that the Emperor of Byzantium appealed to the 'Abbasids to liberate his granddaughter.

Secondly, the early Imamite authors, particularly al-Qummi, al-Nawbakhti, al-Kulayni and al-Mas'udi, who were contemporaries of al-Shaybani, the narrator of this report, do not refer to it in their works. In addition, al-Kashshi, who was a companion of al-Shaybani, and the later scholars al-Najashi and Ibn Dawud claim that he was an extremist ⁵⁸.

Thirdly, al-Kulayni states that *al-Qa'im*'s mother was a slave-girl from al-Nawba, the northern province of Sudan⁵⁹. Moreover al-Nu'mani and al-Saduq related other narrations which indicate that *al-Qa'im*'s mother was to be a black slave-girl⁶⁰. It may be that the later Imamites ignored these transmissions and considered the narration of al-Shaybani as authentic because the latter makes *al-Qa'im*'s mother of noble ancestry and high social status.

They would have been particularly attracted by the connection the report establishes between the Twelfth Imam, *al-Qa'im*, and Jesus, since prophetic traditions state that the two of them will rise together to rid the world of tyranny⁶¹.

In the light of these three points the narration of–Muhammad b. Bahr al–Shaybani can be rejected despite the fact that al–Tusi and Ibn Rustam al–Tabari consider it reliable⁶². Possibly the correct account of the origin of *al–Qa'im*'s mother is given by al–Mufid, who states that she was a slave–girl brought up in the house of Hakima, the sister of the tenth Imam. According to his report the Imam saw her one day and predicted that she would give birth to someone with special Divine blessing⁶³.

According to al–Saduq she died before the death of her husband, al–Hasari al–'Askari, in 260/874.⁶⁴ But al–Najashi's report indicates that she was alive after this year hiding at the house of Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Hamza, one of the close associates of her husband al–'Askari⁶⁵.

B) The Birth of the Twelfth Imam

Since the eleventh Imam died without leaving an obvious son, most of his followers, who held that he had in fact left a successor, based their belief on traditions attributed to the preceding Imams concerning *al–Qa'im* al–Mahdi and his occultation⁶⁶. The following statements, some of which we have already had occasion to relate, are examples of these traditions: The world cannot be void of a Proof, either manifest and well–known, or hidden because of fear⁶⁷.

The Imamate cannot be vested to two brothers after al–Hasan and al–Husayn⁶⁸. According to al–Sadiq, the "Master of the Command" (*Sahib al–Amr*) will have two occultations. One of them will be so prolonged that some will say that he has died and others will say that he has been killed, and finally only a few of his followers will remain faithful to his Imamate.

No one will become cognizant of his whereabouts and his affairs except his intimate partisans, who will look after his affairs⁶⁹. It is worth mentioning that this last tradition had also been recorded before the death of al–'Askari in 260/874 by the Sevener Imamites, the Waqifa who had applied these traditions to the seventh Imam Musa al–Kazim⁷⁰.

Abu Sahl al–Nawbakhti reports that al–'Askari had intimate partisans who used to narrate traditions concerning Islamic law on his authority and were his deputies. When al–'Askari died in 260/874 all of them agreed that he had left a son who was the Imam. Al–Nawbakhti adds that they forbade their adherents to ask about his name or to reveal his existence to his foes, who were at that time trying to arrest him⁷¹.

The 'Abbasids' political pressure, which forced al–'Askari to hide the birth of his son from the ordinary Imamites, may also have led the Twelfth Imam to transmit different reports concerning the date of his birth, some of which took on a hagiographical form.

Most of the Imamite sources agree that al–'Askari's son was born on Friday, the 15th of Sha'ban⁷², but they differ about the year of his birth. Al–Qummi gives an account of a group of Imamites who held that al– 'Askari had died and left a son called Muhammad, who had already come of age when his father died⁷³.

But they did not fix the year of his birth. Perhaps this group based their belief in the existence of al-'Askari's son mainly upon the tradition which says that the earth cannot be void of a Proof. Unfortunately al-Qummi does not report any witnesses to the birth of the Imam from this group to support their opinion.

Al-Kulayni, al-Mufid and al-Tusi mention four different viewpoints concerning the date of the Twelfth Imam's birth. The first was related by 'Allan al-Razi and al-Kulayni on the authority of 'Ali b. Muhammad, who states that the Twelfth Imam was born in 255/868.⁷⁴ Al-Tusi reports two narrations attributed to Hakima bint al-Jawad which support this date⁷⁵.

The second report states that he was born in 258/871. This report is attributed by Daw' b. 'Ali al-'Ijli to an anonymous Persian who related that in the year 260/873 he had come to Samarra from Persia to serve in the house of al-'Askari. According to the Persian one of al-'Askari's slave-girls had given birth and he saw the child in the arms of another slave-girl. He estimated his age at about two years⁷⁶.

Another transmission, on the authority of Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Bilal, relates that al-'Askari informed him twice about his successor: once in 258/871, then three days before his death in 260/874.⁷⁷

The narration attributed to Daw' does not mention explicitly the date of the Imam's birth nor the time when the narrator gave his estimation, whether it was before or after the death of al-'Askari. Regarding the narration of Ibn Bilal, although al-'Askari informed him about the existence of his successor in 258/871, this does not indicate or reveal that the birth of his son occurred in that year. In fact it leads us to think that the birth occurred before 258/871.

The third viewpoint was that of a group of Imamites who thought that al-'Askari's son had been born after his father's death in 261/874. They claimed that a slave-girl had conceived a child belonging to al-'Askari, and that her pregnancy had been known to the caliph as well as to other people.

Thus the authorities delayed the division of his share of the estate until the pregnancy was proved invalid to the caliph. They contended that the Imam was born eight months after his father's death, and was then hidden. Al-'Askari had commanded that he be named Muhammad⁷⁸.

From the historical viewpoint, the account given by this group is completely unconvincing and in itself does not encourage one to believe that al-'Askari had left a successor. Firstly, al-'Askari's slave-girl, Saqil, who had claimed that she was pregnant by her master, was detained by the 'Abbasid authorities for two years until the pregnancy was proved invalid⁷⁹. Secondly, al-Kulayni reports that Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari⁸⁰ once asked the eleventh Imam

*"O master, do you have a son?" He replied, "Yes." Abu Hashim said, "If something should happen to you, where should I ask for him?" The Imam said, "In Medina."*⁸¹

It is well-known that al-'Askari died in 260/874 and that Abu Hashim died the following year. Therefore

this narration would suggest that the birth occurred before 260/874. Thirdly, al-Mas'udi reports that the Twelfth Imam was born two years after the death of his grandfather, al-Hadi⁸². As the latter died in 254/869,⁸³ the birth would have occurred in 256/870.

Al-Mas'udi's narration adds weight to the fourth viewpoint, which places the birth of the Twelfth Imam in 256/870. The Imamite sources record many narrations in favour of this date⁸⁴. The most important one, however, is mentioned on the authority of Mu'alla b. Muhammad and Ahmad b. Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah, who related that al-'Askari issued a letter to his reliable followers after the assassination of al-Muhtadi, the caliph, saying,

"This is the punishment of him who has sinned against Allah, the Exalted, in regard to his legatees. He thought that he would kill me without offspring. Now he has seen the omnipotence of Allah, the Exalted."

The narration continues to report that in fact the Imam had a son called Muhammad, who was born in 256/870.⁸⁵

Al-Muhtadi was dethroned and died in Rajab 256/870.⁸⁶

Moreover all the Imamite narrators agree that the birth of the Twelfth Imam occurred on the 15th of Sha'ban. So if one links the death of al-Muhtadi in the month of Rajab with the letter of al-'Askari which was issued in the next month, Sha'ban, it would seem plausible that the Imam's birth occurred on the 15th of Sha'ban in 256/870.

Furthermore al-Mas'udi reports an anecdote attributed to Khadija bint Muhammad al-Jawad to support such a hypothesis. In 262/875 a certain man called Ahmad b. Ibrahim asked her about al-'Askari's successor, and she confirmed his existence, adding that he had taken over the Imamate on 11th Rabi' 1260/874 at the age of four years and seven months⁸⁷, which means that he was born on 15th Sha'ban 256/18th July 870.

It is worth quoting here a narration concerning the birth of the Twelfth Imam which was viewed as authentic by the time of al-Mas'udi, who died in 345/956. Al-Saduq presented it as follows and attributed it to Hakima bint al-Jawad, who related,

"Abu Muhammad al-Hasan b. 'Ali, peace be upon both of them, called on me with the message, 'O aunt, break your fast at our house tonight, because it is the fifteenth of Sha'ban. Tonight Allah, the Exalted, will manifest the Hujja, His Proof on earth.' (When I went to the house), I asked him who the mother of the child was. He said, 'Narjis.'

I said, 'May Allah make me your sacrifice! But there is no sign of pregnancy in her!' He said, 'What I am telling you is so.' Therefore I went in and greeted them. When I had taken my seat Narjis came forward to take off my shoes and said to me, 'My mistress and the lady of my family, how are you tonight?'

I said, 'Nay you are the mistress of myself and my family.' But she denied my speech and replied, 'What

are you saying, O aunt?' I said to her, 'O my daughter, tonight Allah the Exalted will give you a son who shall be the Master in this world and in the hereafter' She became embarrassed and blushed.

"After I had finished my evening prayer I broke my fast and then went to sleep. At midnight I woke for prayer. I performed my prayer while Narjis was sleeping, without any sign of childbirth. Then I sat down performing the supererogatory prayer. Thereafter I went to bed and got up again, but she was still sleeping. Then she got up, performed her supererogatory prayer and lay down again."

Hakima continued, "I went out to see the dawn and found that its first stage was about to appear. But she was still asleep. So I began to doubt al- 'Askari's expectation. Just then he called out from his place, 'Do not be in a hurry, O aunt, the matter is approaching.' I sat down and recited the Qur'anic suras Ha Mim al-Sajda (40) and Yasin (36). At that moment she got up alarmed. I ran to her and said, 'The name of Allah be upon you, do you feel anything?'

She replied, 'O aunt, yes.' Then I said to her 'Gather yourself and procure peace in your heart.' However at that moment we felt sleepy and drowsiness overcame us. After that I got up at the voice of my Master, and when I raised the covering from him I saw him, peace be upon him, prostrate on the ground⁸⁸. I took him to my bosom and noticed that he was pure and clean.

Abu Muhammad called out to me and said, 'O aunt, bring my son to me,' and I did so ... Afterwards al- 'Askari put his tongue in his mouth and gently stroked his eyes, ears and joints with his hand. Then he said, 'O my son, speak.' The child replied, 'I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, He is unique and has no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah.' Then he sent his greetings upon the commander of the faithful (Amir al-Mu'minin), and upon the Imams respectively until he stopped at the name of his father. Then he stopped speaking.

"Abu Muhammad said, 'O aunt, take him to his mother, so that he may greet her, and then bring him back to me.' I took him to her and when he had done so I brought him back and left him there. Al-Askari said to me, 'O aunt, come to visit us on the seventh day.' The next day I came to greet Abu Muhammad and raised the curtain to see my Master. But I did not see him. So I asked the Imam, 'May Allah make me your sacrifice! What has happened to my Master?' He replied, 'O aunt, we have entrusted him to the one to whom the mother of Moses entrusted her son.'⁸⁹

Hakima said, "On the seventh day I came and greeted him and took my seat. Abu Muhammad said, 'Bring my son to me.' I brought him wrapped in a piece of cloth, and the Imam repeated what he had done on the first day and the child said what he had said before. Then he recited the Qur'anic verse"

***And We desired to show favour unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them Imams and to make them the inheritors. And to establish them in the earth, and to show Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts that which they feared from them. "*⁹⁰**

The hagiographical nature of this account is obvious. However, certain of its elements suggest

something about the nature of the birth. It seems that the pregnancy of Narjis was deliberately concealed, and a close relative was brought in to act as midwife only when the birth was due. If this was the case and a son was indeed born to al- 'Askari – the likeliest date being 256/870 – then the reasons for the concealment of the pregnancy and the birth would be the same as the reasons for the Imam's occultation.

3. The Reasons for the First Occultation of the Twelfth Imam

The early Imamite works mention three reasons for the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, reasons which mirror the new tactics of the Imams in their religious and political activities

Al-Sadiq was reported to have said that *al-Qa'im* would go into occultation before he rose again, because he would be afraid of being killed⁹¹. A second reason is mentioned on the authority of the Twelfth Imam, who was reported as having informed his partisan Ishaq b. Ya'qub that all his forefathers had paid the oath of obedience to oppressive rulers, but that he had hidden himself in order to rise in arms, and had made no oath of obedience to any oppressive ruler⁹².

This reason had already been mentioned by al-Hasan and al-Riḍā, who both said that *al-Qa'im* alone would not swear fealty to an oppressive ruler⁹³. The third reason is mentioned by al-Kulayni, who states that the occultation was a test set by Allah for his creatures, so as to see who would remain steadfast in acknowledging the Imamate of the Twelfth Imam⁹⁴.

These three reasons depict a new phase in the attitude of the Imamites toward their struggle for power. It appears that the quiescent policy of the Imams towards the 'Abbasid regime, along with their continued intellectual activities, had led the Imamite organization to a more politically developed situation.

This fact encouraged the Twelfth Imam to instigate underground political activities against the 'Abbasids. At the same time, he knew that certain followers of his forefathers had caused the failure of two bids for power in 70/689 and 140/757 by revealing the activities of the Imams to their enemies, which led to their arrest and the failure of their attempt⁹⁵.

Perhaps such incidents obliged the Twelfth Imam to live in a state of concealment even from his own followers so as to practice his underground activities through the Imamite organization and to evade any 'Abbasid bid to arrest him. This is indicated by many traditions commanding the Imamites to keep the name of *al-Qa'im* a secret⁹⁶.

Al-Kulayni reports that, after the death of al- 'Askari in 260/874, some people among his adherents asked the agent (wakil), Abu Abd Allah al-Salihi, to ask about the name and residence of the Twelfth Imam for them. When he did so, the answer was,

"If you reveal the name to them, they will reveal it in public; and if they realize the place of his residence they will lead foes to it."⁹⁷

Al-Kulayni mentions another report which asserts that the occultation of the Twelfth Imam was a preparatory step for the overthrow of the state of injustice⁹⁸.

It is relevant to study the plan of al-'Askari to hide his son and the 'Abbasid attitude towards the Imamites after the death of al-'Askari so as to see why the later felt it necessary to hide his son.

4. Al- 'Askari's Plan to Hide his Successor

The circumstances which accompanied the birth of al-'Askari's son suggest that al-'Askari wanted to save his successor from the restrictive policy of the 'Abbasids, which had been established by al-Ma'mun. Hence he did not circulate in public the news concerning the birth of his son, but only disclosed it to a few reliable followers, such as Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari, Ahmad b. Ishaq, and Hakima and Khadija, the aunts of al-'Askari⁹⁹.

Moreover he decided to move his son to a place safer than Samarra so that he could carry on his religious and political activities through the *Wikala* without suffering the interference of the 'Abbasids.

Study of the hagiographical and historical anecdotes concerning the first occultation of the Imam and his reappearance reveals that al-'Askari hid his son first in Samarra and then in Medina, where he lived under the guardianship of his paternal grandmother. According to al-Saduq, al-'Askari sent his son to an unknown place forty days after his birth, and then his son was brought back to his mother¹⁰⁰.

According to al-Mas'udi, three years later, in the year 259/873, al-'Askari asked his own mother, Hadith to go on the pilgrimage. He explained his critical position to her, gave her full instructions, and sent his son with her. His son had already received from his father the signs of the Imamate, the most esteemed name of Allah, the inheritance and the weapon.

Thereafter Hadith and her grandson went to Mecca under the protection of a close friend called Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Muttahir¹⁰¹. It appears that after they had performed the rite of pilgrimage they went to Medina, which was used as the place of concealment for the Twelfth Imam.

Many reports incline one to accept the above description of the Twelfth Imam's early life. As we have seen, Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari once asked al-'Askari where he should ask for his successor were he to die. Al-'Askari said, "In Medina." Another report states that the residence of *al-Qa'im* would be in Medina, surrounded by thirty intimate followers¹⁰².

All the traditions concerning the rise of *al-Qa'im* indicate that it will occur in Mecca¹⁰³. The Imamite sources record that the Twelfth Imam *al-Qa'im* went on the pilgrimage every year¹⁰⁴. Such evidence indicates that the Twelfth Imam was in an area not far from Mecca, perhaps Medina.

As part of al-'Askari's prudent fear, he made his manifest testament only to his mother, Hadith, and did not mention any successor openly to anyone else¹⁰⁵. From all this it seems most probable that the

Twelfth Imam spent most of his early life in Medina, because al-'Askari recognised the danger which his son would face were he to remain in Iraq.

5. The Abbasid Attempt to Arrest al-'Askari's Son

The caliph al-Mu'tamid continued the 'Abbasid policy of putting the Imams under close watch and enforced it even more vigorously with the spread of the traditions concerning the role of the Twelfth Imam.

On hearing about the deterioration of al-'Askari's health, al-Mu'tamid sent five of his most trusted officers, amongst whom was his servant Nahrir, to the house of al-'Askari to watch over him. He also ordered the chief judge, al-Hasan b. Abi al-Shawarib¹⁰⁶, to send ten reliable people to participate in this task.

When al-'Askari died on 8th Rabi' I 260/1st January 874, the caliph sent a contingent to search his house. They sealed off all his estate and then looked for his son to the extent that they even brought women to examine his slavegirls in case any of them were pregnant¹⁰⁷.

Despite the fact that the primary investigation proved to al-Mu'tamid that al-'Askari died without leaving a son, the vast majority of the Imamites held that he had in fact left one¹⁰⁸.

According to the Imamite works, Ja'far, the brother of al-'Askari, who had already claimed to be the Imam and tried to succeed his brother, revealed to the authorities the Imamites' belief in the existence of al-'Askari's successor. Al-Saduq reports that a band of people from Qumm, among whom was Muhammad b. Ja'far al-Himyari, arrived at Samarra in ignorance of the death of al-'Askari with letters of inquiry and legal taxes.

There they learned about his death and were directed to Ja'far. They met him and wanted to indulge in the ceremonies which they had practiced before on such occasions.

They asked Ja'far to tell them about the amount of money they had brought and who had given it to them. Ja'far replied that he was no soothsayer and that the things the Imamites claimed about al-'Askari were mere lies, because Allah alone could know such things. He then told them to hand the money over to him, but they refused to do so, and their quarrel became public.

While they were arguing someone came, called them by name and led them to a house. There he showed them someone who was believed to be the agent of the Twelfth Imam and who revealed to them how much money they had brought. Therefore they accepted the Imamate of the Twelfth Imam. Having done so they were commanded that they should henceforth hand the money to a certain man in Baghdad¹⁰⁹.

According to al-Saduq, Ja'far went straight to the caliph, al-Mu'tamid, and informed him that the

Imamites still believed in the existence of a son of al-'Askari. Al-Mu'tamid immediately had this investigated by sending a band of soldiers with Ja'far to search the house of al-'Askari and the houses of the neighbours¹¹⁰.

They arrested a slave-girl called Saqil and demanded that she show them the child, but she denied having given birth to a child. According to al-Saduq, in order to save the life of the Twelfth Imam, Saqil claimed to be pregnant¹¹¹. Thereupon al-Mu'tamid incarcerated her in his harem for observation.

Under the supervision of Nahrir, the caliph's wives and slave-girls and the wives of the chief judge, Ibn Abi al-Shawarib, observed Saqil for two years until they felt that further observation was no longer necessary. When disturbances occurred in various parts of the Empire and the vizier 'Ubayd Allah Ibn Khaqan suddenly died, they ignored her completely¹¹².

Many reports indicate that while Saqil was imprisoned the 'Abbasids carried out a campaign of persecution against the Imamites and that Ja'far was behind it. In spite of the fact that the Imamites lost many people, all attempts on the part of the authorities to arrest the Twelfth Imam proved fruitless.

According to al-Mufid, al-'Askari wanted to deny the 'Abbasids the opportunity to find any trace which might endanger the life of his successor. Hence he devised a plan whereby according to his public will he left his estate only to his mother, Hadith¹¹³.

On hearing of the death of her son, she came from Medina to Samarra to take over the estate, but found that it was under 'Abbasid control. Furthermore, Ja'far quarrelled with her about his brother's inheritance, insisting on his right to the estate. He raised the case with the authorities, who were trying to confirm that al-'Askari had no son by interfering in it.

Hadith maintained that al-'Askari had made her his sole heiress, and that according to Imamite law Ja'far had no right to the estate of his brother¹¹⁴.

This quarrel went on for two years until the pregnancy of Saqil proved false. Although the judge adjudicated in favour of Hadith, Ja'far's claim was not disputed because of his influential connections. In the end the estate was divided into two parts, in spite of Imamite law¹¹⁵.

¹ N. Firaq, 65-6,77,79.

² The reports of the early Shi'ite authors like al-Kulayni, Sa'd al-Qummi and al-Mufid did not reveal any external cause for al-'Askari's death (al-Kafi, I, 509; Q. Maqalat, 101-2, al-Irshad, 377, 383, 389; al-Mufid, al-Muqni'a fi al-Fiqh [Iran, 1274], 72-5; and his Tashih l'tiqadat al-Imamiyya [Tabriz, 1371], 63,) but the later Shi'ite authors followed al-Tabari, who claimed that the Imam was poisoned or killed. He based this assumption on a tradition whose chain of transmitters related to al-Sadiq, who said "None of us die naturally, but are killed or martyred." (al-Tabarsi, Ilam al-Wara, 349; Muhammad b. Ja'far al-Tabari, Dala'il al-Imama [Najaf, 1369], 223, Ibn Shahr Ashub, Manaqib, IV,421; Bihar, L, 236-8, 335, Muhammad al-Sadr, Tarikh al-Ghayba al-Sughra [Beirut, 1972], 230-4).

³ Ibn Shahr Ashub, Manaqib, III; 533; Ithbat, 262; Subhi, Nazariyyat al-Imaina (Cairo, 1969), 394.

⁴ Al-Kulayni and al-Mufid report the same chain of transmitters for their information about al-'Askari's death (al-Kafi, I, 503-5; al-Irshad, 381-2, 389). Al-Nawbakhti agrees with Sad al-Qummi that Abu 'Isa prayed 'Askari's body (N. Firaq, 79;

Q. Maqalat, 102). But Sad dates al-ʿAskari's death in Rabi' II, which agrees with al-Mas'udi's report (Ithbat, 248). Al Kulayni's report seems to be more reliable than the latter, since it adds several supporting reports.

5. N. Firaq, 79; Q. Maqalat, 102.

6. al-Irshad, 389–90; Kama'l (Tehran 1378/1958), I, 101.

7. Al-Barqi and al-Kulayni mention many traditions with different chains of transmitters asserting that the world cannot be without a Proof (Hujja); al-Barqi, al-Mahasin (Tehran, 1370/1950), 92, 234–6; al-Kafi, I, 178–80, 514; see also Dala'il, 229–30; Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj (Najaf, 1966), II, 48–9, 78.

8. al-Kafi, I, 285–6; al-Ghayba, 146.

9. al-Kafi, I, 276–7.

10. Q. Maqalat, 109.

11. Because of the way al-Shahristani classifies his information on these schisms, it seems that his study is based on the works of al-Nawbakhti and al-Ash'ari. Al Nawbakhti deemed the Imamite sub-divisions to be as many as fourteen, although his work in its present form counts only thirteen. Fortunately al Mufid, who discusses the various factions on the authority of al-Nawbakhti, mentions the fourteenth faction, which is missing from al-Nawbakhti's work. Al-Mas'udi does not give any details on the splits. Later al-Nawbakhti's work became more circulated than Sa'd al-Qummi's work, because the latter contains opinions on the occultation which contrast with the official opinion of the later Imamites from the fifth/eleventh century onwards; al-Qummi's book was gradually withdrawn from these circles; N. Firaq, 79; al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 258–60; Muruj, VIII, 50, Milal, 130–1.

12. Kama'l, 40.

13. al-Kafi, I, 178–80, 514.

14. Q. Maqalat, 106; N. Firaq, 78–80; Milal, 129.

15. Q. Maqalat, 106–107.

16. al-Kafi, I, 178; al-Sharif al-Radi (ed.), Nahj al-Bahagha (Beirut, 1967), 497; N Firaq, 80–1.

17. Q. Maqalat, 107.

18. N. Firaq, 89–90.

19. Q. Maqalat, 111; al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 259.

20. Al-Fathiyya: A Shi'ite sect which arose after the death of Ja'far al-Sadiq, the sixth Imam, who contended that the Imamate had passed on from al-Sadiq not to Musa but to his eldest son, 'Abd Allah, according to the tradition which says that the Imamate can only be vested in the eldest son, with the condition that he should be free from any bodily defects (al-Kafi, I, 285; Ikhtiyar, 282–3). They were also called al-Fathiyya as an allusion either to 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far because he had broad feet or was broad-headed, or it referred to their leader, who was called 'Abd Allah al-Aftah: N. Firaq 65; al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 248–51; Ikhtiyar, 254.

21. N. Firaq, 93; Q. Maqalat, 111–2.

22. Al-bada' means the appearance of something or some knowledge after it has been concealed. In theological terms, it is a dogma which deals with the question of whether or not it is possible for God to change His decision about something. The theologians maintain that this is impossible, even if it often appears to happen, as for example when Ja'far al-Sadiq designated Isma'il as his successor according to God's command. For when Isma'il died, God then ordered Ja'far to designate Musa al-Kazim as his successor. So it seems that God changed his decision about who was to succeed Ja'far. But in fact, God's eternal knowledge never changes. What changes is the degree to which men are cognizant of that knowledge. Hence the doctrine of al-bada' states that God's ultimate judgement about something often appears to men only after first having been concealed. It declares that God cannot have changed His decision, for that would imply that His knowledge changes, or that He was ignorant and then gained knowledge. Finally, the Imamites hold that God does allow certain people to have knowledge of His ultimate judgement. Bandar, A., 'Aqidat al-Bada' (Baghdad, 1976); also a letter from the author dated 15th January 1978.

23. N. Firaq, 99; al-Shahristani's information concerning this sect is confused. He claims that Faris b. Hatim, not his sister, was a follower of Ja'far, but Faris had been assassinated by the order of al-Askari himself; see Milal, 129; Ikhtiyar, 524.

24. For the dogma of Faris b. Hatim, his political activities in Qazwm and Samarra, and his assassination, see Ikhtiyar, 522–8; al-Najashi, 238; T. al-Ghayba, 238.

- [25.](#) Al-Nawbakhti and al-Qummi mention that a group maintained that Ja'far was the Imam after al-'Askari not by the testament of his brother but by that of his father. Thus they held that the adoption of the Imamate of al-'Askari was incorrect and that people should go back to the Imamate of Ja'far; N. Firaq, 82–3; Q. Maqalat, 110–1; al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 259.
- [26.](#) For this tradition see al-Kafi, I, 285–6; T. al-Ghayba, 146.
- [27.](#) N. Firaq, 79; Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Rahman b. Qubba, al-Insaf fi al-Imams, quoted in Kama'l, 55.
- [28.](#) Kama'l, 51–3.
- [29.](#) Kama'l, 511; Bihar, LIII, 190–1.
- [30.](#) Q. Maqalat, 112–3; N. Firaq, 88–9, Ibn Qubba, op. cit., quoted in Kama'l, 59. About Ibn Qubba and his work see al-Najashi, 290–1, T. al-Fihrist, 297–8.
- [31.](#) Q. Maqalat, 103.
- [32.](#) Q. Maqalat, 109.
- [33.](#) N. Firaq, 84.
- [34.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 128–9; al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 259.
- [35.](#) Q. Maqalat, 114; N. Firaq, 84–5; Milal, 130.
- [36.](#) Kama'l, II, 78, 109–10; see al-Galbaygani, op. cit., 356.
- [37.](#) Q. Maqalat, 114; T. al-Ghayba, 147; al-Mufid also mentions this faction but thought that they held the same dogma as al-Qat'iyya (The Twelvers); al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 259–60.
- [38.](#) Q. Maqalat, 114; N. Firaq, 85; al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 261; Milal, 130.
- [39.](#) Al-Nawbakhti's information about this sect is confused, whereas al-Qummi and al-Mufid are much clearer in their presentation; N. Firaq, 85–6; Q. Maqalat, 114–5; al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 260.
- [40.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 60.
- [41.](#) al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 260.
- [42.](#) Q. Maqalat, 102–4; Abu Sahl al-Nawbakhti, Kitab al-Tanbih, quoted in Kama'l, 88; al-Insaf quoted in Kama'l, 61.
- [43.](#) This group dated his birth as mentioned but the later Imamites differ about it. Ibn Rustam al-Tabari dates it as 15th Sha'ban 257, while al-Kulayni mentions several traditions giving the dates 252, 255 and 256 respectively. Al-Saduq and al-Mufid follow al-Kulayni on this point. Some of the factions opposed to the Imamites may have abandoned their claims and joined the Imamites, who then accepted their differing transmissions concerning the birth of the Twelfth Imam; al-Kafi, I, 514–16; Dala'il, 271; al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 258; Kama'l, 430.
- [44.](#) al-Insaj; quoted in Kama'l, 55–6.
- [45.](#) N. Firaq, 90–91.
- [46.](#) Ibn al-Nadim, al-Fihrist, (Tehran, 1972), 225; Kama'l, 482; Q. Maqalat, 106.
- [47.](#) Milal, 130–1; N. Firaq, 88–9.
- [48.](#) Q. Maqalat, 107–8.
- [49.](#) Q. Maqalat, 108–9; T. al-Ghayba, 147.
- [50.](#) Kama'l, 485, 487.
- [51.](#) al-Kafi, I, 518–9.
- [52.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 142–6; al-Fusul al-Mukhtara, 261.
- [53.](#) Ithbat, 248. For the later authors who named her as Narjis see al-Irshad, 390; T. al-Ghayba, 153, 158; 'Uyun, 32–3.
- [54.](#) Bihar, LI, 28, quoted from al-Dirus.
- [55.](#) Kama'l, 431–2.
- [56.](#) Kama'l, 317–23.
- [57.](#) Tabari, III, 1434.
- [58.](#) Ikhtiyar, 147–8; al-Najashi, 298; Ibn Dawud, al-Rijal, 541.
- [59.](#) al-Kafi, I, 323.
- [60.](#) N. al-Ghayba, 84, 85, 120; Kama'l, 329.
- [61.](#) Kama'l, 280, 345; al-Marwazi, Kitab al-Fitan, Mss fol, 150–63.
- [62.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 134–9; Dala'il, 262–4.
- [63.](#) al-Irshad, 390–1.

- [64.](#) Kama'l, 431.
- [65.](#) al-Najashi, 268.
- [66.](#) Ibn Qubba, Naqd Kitab al-Ashhad, quoted in Kama'l, 113.
- [67.](#) al-Kafi I, 178; N. Firaq, 91.
- [68.](#) al-Kafi, I, 285–6; Abu Sahl al-Nawbakhti states in his work al-Tanbih that the main argument used by the Imamites to prove the existence of the Twelfth Imam was the traditions of the preceding Imams, which had been narrated before the death of the eleventh Imam in 260/874; quoted in Kama'l, 92–3; also see N. Firaq, 90–91; Q. Maqalat, 102.
- [69.](#) N. al-Ghayba, 90.
- [70.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 90.
- [71.](#) Abu Sahl al-Nawbakhti, al-Tanbih, quoted in Kama'l, 92–3.
- [72.](#) For example, see al-Kafi, I, 514; Kama'l, 424; al-Irshad, 390. However, Ibn Rustam al-Tabari mentions that al-'Askari's son was born on the 8th of Sha'ban, 257/870; Dalail, 272.
- [73.](#) Q. Maqalat, 114; al-Saduq reports a narration the authority of Ya'qub b. Manfush who claimed that al-'Askari had shown him his son, whose age at that time was between eight and ten years old; Kama'l, 407.
- [74.](#) al-Kafi, I, 329; al-Irshad, 390–391.
- [75.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 150–151, 153.
- [76.](#) al-Kafi, I, 514–5.
- [77.](#) al-Kafi, I, 328; al-Irshad, 394.
- [78.](#) Q. Maqalat, 114; N. Firaq, 85.
- [79.](#) Kama'l, 33.
- [80.](#) According to al-Tabari, Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari died in 261/875; Tabari, III, 1887.
- [81.](#) al-Kafi, I, 328.
- [82.](#) Ithbat, 251.
- [83.](#) According to al-Kulayni the Tenth Imam, al-Hadi, died on 26 Jumada II, 254/2 June 869; al-Kafi, I, 497.
- [84.](#) Kama'l, 432.
- [85.](#) al-Kafi I, 329, 514; Kama'l, 430; T. al-Ghayba, 144.
- [86.](#) Tabari, III, 1813; al-Kama'l, VII, 157.
- [87.](#) Ithbat, 261–2.
- [88.](#) According to al-Kulayni each Imam when he comes out from the womb of his mother puts his hands on the ground and holds his head towards the sky, and then recites some Qur'anic verses; al-Kafi, I, 386.
- [89.](#) Kama'l, 424–6; the account of the birth of the Twelfth Imam has been related in the Imamites' works with some differences in detail. See Ithbat, 248–50; T. al-Ghayba, 150–4; Dalail, 269–70. All the Imamite sources agree that al-'Askari left only one son; al-Saduq, however, reports a narration on the authority of Ibrahim al-Mazyar which indicates that al-'Askari had two sons, Muhammad and Musa, who were living in Hijaz. A critical study of the context of the narration and its chain of transmitters suggests it was invented, mainly because the narrator Ibrahim b. al-Mazyar died before 260/874, whereas according to the narrative al-'Askari's sons were mature, and this is unlikely if the Twelfth Imam was born in 256/874; Kama'l, 445–53.
- [90.](#) al-Qasas, 28: 5–6.
- [91.](#) 'Ilal, 243–4; Kama'l, 24; N. al-Ghayba, 86–7; al-Kafi, I, 340; al-Murtada, Mas'ala wajiza fi al-Ghayba, I I; al-Fusul al-'Ashara, 16.
- [92.](#) N. al-Ghayba, 101; Kama'l, 303, 485.
- [93.](#) 'Ilal, 245; Kama'l, 316.
- [94.](#) al-Kafi, I, 336.
- [95.](#) al-Kafi, I, 369.
- [96.](#) al-Kafi, I, 328, 330.
- [97.](#) al-Kafi, I, 333.
- [98.](#) al-Kafi, I, VIII, 247.
- [99.](#) The Imamite works record the names of many individuals who saw the son of al-'Askari. One report attributed to

Muhammad b. 'Uthman, the second Saf'ir of the Twelfth Imam, says that al-Askari gathered together forty of his reliable followers and showed them his son; Kama'l, 435; al-Kafi, I, 330-1; T. al-Ghayba, 148, 152

[100.](#) Kama'l, 429.

[101.](#) Ithbat, 247-8, 253.

[102.](#) al-Kafi I, 328, 240; N. al-Ghayba, 99-100; T. al-Ghayba, 149.

[103.](#) 'Abd al-Razzaq al-San'ani, al-Musannaf (Beirut, 1972), XI, 371; N. al-Ghayba, 98-9.

[104.](#) al-Kafi, I, 339.

[105.](#) al-Fusul al-'Ashara, 13.

[106.](#) Al-Hasan b. Muhammad was related to an Umayyad family called Al Abi al-Shawarib. During the 'Abbasid period most of his relatives worked in the office of Judge (al-Qada'). As part of his anti-shi'ite policy al-Mutawakkil included al-Hasan b. Abi al-Shawarib among his courtiers (Tabari, III, 1428). Later al-Mu'tazz appointed him chief judge in 252/866 (Tabari, III, 1684). Three years later he was discharged from his office, but recovered it during al-Mu'tadid's regime. He continued in this office until his death in Mecca in 261/875; Tabari, III, 1787, 1790-1, 1891, 1907.

[107.](#) al-Kafi, I, 505; Kama'l, 43.

[108.](#) Kama'l, 43.

[109.](#) Kama'l, 476- 478.

[110.](#) Kama'l, 473.

[111.](#) Kama'l, 476.

[112.](#) Kama'l, 474.

[113.](#) al-Fusul al-'Ashara, 13.

[114.](#) According to Imamite law, if a dead person leaves a mother and a son and a brother, the brother has no right to take anything from the estate; al-Saduq, almuqnia (Tehran, 1377), 171; Kama'l, 47, 58.

[115.](#) Muhammad al-Sadr, op. cit., I, 314.

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