

# The Underground Activities of the Second Saf'ir of the Twelfth Imam

## **1. The Designation of the Second Saf'ir, Abu Ja'far**

The second *Saf'ir* was Muhammad b. 'Uthman b. Said al-'Umari. His kunya was Abu Ja'far. He carried out his activities first as the agent of the Twelfth Imam and then as his *Saf'ir* for about fifty years, having been the principal assistant of his father, the first *Saf'ir*, from the time of the eleventh Imam, al-'Askari. According to al-Tusi, when the first *Saf'ir* died, Abu Ja'far carried out the last rites for the dead man, washed the corpse, clad him in his shroud and buried him.

For the Imamites, these are the unmistakable signs that Abu Ja'far was acting as the representative and the *Saf'ir* of the hidden Imam. According to them he did all this at the order of the first *Saf'ir*. Moreover he was promoted to the office of the sifara both by the designation of al-'Askari and of the first *Saf'ir*, 'Uthman b. Said, according to the order of the Twelfth Imam<sup>1</sup>.

After his father's death, Abu Ja'far received a letter of condolence attributed to the Twelfth Imam, who offered his sympathy at his father's death and pointed out that he had been installed in his office<sup>2</sup>.

However, some of the principal agents of the organization had serious reservations and doubts about his designation, as did Muhammad b. Nusayr, the leader of the extremist trend, the Ghulat. So Abu Ja'far did not succeed to his office without encountering certain difficulties.

### **A) Ibn Hilal**

Ahmad b. Hilal al-'Abartai was one of those who denied the validity of Abu Ja'far's designation. He was born in the year 180/796 in 'Abarta', a village in the district of Askaf near Nahrawan, and died in the year 267/880. It is clear from the numerous references to his name in the chain of transmissions (*isnad*) of the Imamite narrations that he was a well-known theologian who had narrated most of the Shiite books of traditions (*usul*).

Beginning in 204/819 he had related several traditions indicating, that the Twelfth Imam would be *a/-Qa'im*, having first gone into occultation<sup>3</sup>.

Al-Kashshi reports that he was a pious mystic and an eminent scholar, and some biographers respectfully mention the fact that he undertook fifty-four pilgrimages to Mecca, twenty of them on foot.<sup>4</sup> According to a letter attributed to the Twelfth Imam, Ibn Hilal was one of the most important scholars in Iraq during the time of the first *Saf'ir* and possessed an amount of money belonging to the Imam, which he refused to pay to the second *Saf'ir*.<sup>5</sup>

The Imamite reports of his refusal to obey Abu Ja'far's instructions are confused and contradictory so it is rather difficult to discover the true state of affairs. According to al-Najashi Ibn Hilal had already been cursed by al-'Askari, who had spoken against him on several occasions.<sup>6</sup>

Sa'd al-Qummi states that he abandoned Shi'ism and embraced the nasb doctrine,<sup>7</sup> whereas al-Tusi accused him of holding an extremist doctrine (ghuluw).<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that the different accusations made against him are attempts to define his beliefs rather than explanations of his dispute with the second *Saf'ir*. Al-Tusi mentions a report attributed to an agent called Muhammad b. Humam, which states that Ibn Hilal denied neither the existence of the Twelfth Imam nor the validity of the office of the first *Saf'ir*.

When Ibn Hilal was questioned about this by the Imamites, he replied that the Imam had personally installed the first *Saf'ir*, 'Uthman b. Said, and made this known 'to all the faithful, but he had not done any such thing for Abu Ja'far.<sup>9</sup>

Because of Ibn Hilal's attitude towards the second safar he was expelled by the Imam in a letter distributed amongst the agents in Iraq which warned that the mystical practices of Ibn Hilal grew from hypocrisy and dissimulation.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the fact that the eminent agents of the organization already knew the cause of Ibn Hilal's excommunication, some of the Imamite narrators in Iraq who were not agents were astonished at the excommunication of such a pious mystic, and so they rejected the pronouncement. In fact the considerable support for Ibn Hilal may have been brought about by the Iraqi narrators who did not know about the dispute between Abu Ja'far and Ibn Hilal concerning the sifara.

They asked the agent al-Qasim b. al-'Ala to inquire about the pronouncement against Ibn Hilal, and he put this question in writing to the Imam via the second *Saf'ir*. The Imam replied:

*"Ibn Hilal was an incorrigible sinner and Allah will not forgive his sins. He behaved like a stubborn and arrogant person. Moreover, he has kept for himself money given for the Imam and refused to carry out our commands unless they suit his wishes. However we kept our composure until Allah fulfilled our prayer by taking away his soul.*

*Concerning his case, we had informed a few of our close associates (*mawali*) during his time and ordered them to reveal it to the intimates among our adherents. . . There is no excuse for any of our followers to doubt the statements of our confidantes (*thuqatuna*), because we reveal these statements to them.*"<sup>11</sup>

This document shows clearly that Ibn Hilal had died, but that in spite of the Imam's strong criticism of him, the second *Saf'ir* could not completely eliminate the danger he had stirred up for his office. Al-Kashshi reports that a group of people remained firm in their loyalty towards Ibn Hilal and doubted the authenticity of the above pronouncement<sup>12</sup>.

In fact the loyalty of this body to Ibn Hilal was mainly based not upon his inward spiritual faith, but upon his external and personal mystic acts. According to the Imamite doctrine, the worship of Allah is invalid without the recognition of and obedience to the Imams<sup>13</sup>. Hence the mystic acts of Ibn Hilal were invalid, because he refused to recognise the second *Saf'ir*, who had been installed by the Imam himself.

According to al-Tusi, the influence of Ibn Hilal continued until the time of the third safar, Ibn Ruh, who circulated another Tawqi' on the authority of the Imam against Ibn Hilal<sup>14</sup>:

*"Although there are those among the Imamites who do not understand how such a great and pious man could have been excommunicated, what is piety if it please Allah to transform good deeds into sins? Al-Dihqan*<sup>15</sup> *was also a pious man in the service of the Imam, yet Allah eventually changed his faith into impiety because of his arrogance. This also happened to Ibn Hilal"*<sup>16</sup>

In fact it is hard to attribute this Tawqi' to the time of the third *Saf'ir*, Ibn Ruh 305–326/917–937), because during that time there is no trace of the influence of Ibn Hilal's claim upon the Imamites. It is most likely that Ibn Ruh circulated this pronouncement against Ibn Hilal on the order of the second *Saf'ir* while he was still working as an agent beneath him, especially if one bears in mind that Ibn Hilal died in 267/880, a long time before Ibn Ruh held the *sifara*. It would appear that Ibn Hilal's challenge had vanished before the death of the second *Saf'ir* in 305/917.

## **B) al-Bilali**

According to al-Tusi, a second opponent to Abu Ja'far's claim to the *sifara* was Abu Tahir Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Bilal, who was commonly called al-Bilali<sup>17</sup>. He was well known in Imamite circles as a narrator of traditions<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore he was amongst the principal agents in Baghdad and had close relations with both the tenth and the eleventh Imams<sup>19</sup>.

The latter described al-Bilali to Ishaq b. Ibrahim al-Nisaburi with this phrase: "He is reliable, trustworthy and is acquainted with what he must do."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, according to al-Kulayni and al-Saduq, al-'Askari twice revealed to al-Bilali the birth of his son, the Twelfth Imam: firstly in 258/871 and then three days before his death<sup>21</sup>.

However, al-Bilali denied that Abu Ja'far was the *Safir* and claimed that he himself was the agent of the Imam. He kept the money of the Imam in his own hands and refused to relinquish it to Abu Ja'far. Al-Bilali's claim led to a serious split amongst the Imamites, since a considerable body of Imamites accepted his claim and followed him, such as his brother Abu al-Tayyib and Ibn Hirz<sup>22</sup>. But al-Tusi neither fixes the date of this split nor the duration of al-Bilali's claims.

It is most likely that al-Bilali's claim lasted only for a few years after the death of the first *Safir*, by which time Abu Ja'far had proved himself to be the rightful *Safir* of the Imam. Al-Tusi reports that Abu Ja'far arranged a secret meeting between al-Bilali and the Twelfth Imam to prove to him that he was acting on his behalf. Abu Ja'far took him to one of his houses where, it is said, they met the Imam, who ordered al-Bilali to hand the money over to Abu Ja'far<sup>23</sup>.

Al Tusi's report reveals that al-Bilali's importance in the organization was such that Abu Ja'far had to arrange this secret meeting with the Imam in Baghdad to put an end to the doubts raised by al-Bilali, doubts which had led to a split among the agents. According to al Tusi, shortly after this meeting Abu Ja'far went to al-Bilali's house, where his close supporters like Ibn Hirz and Abu al-Tayyib were assembled. Abu Ja'far asked al-Bilali,

*"O Abu Tahir (al-Bilali), I ask you by Allah, did the Sahib al-Zaman (the Twelfth Imam), peace be upon him, not command you to hand the money (of the Imam) which you have over to me?" Al-Bilali replied, "Yes." Then Abu Ja'far left the house.*<sup>24</sup>

It is clear from this report that by these two steps Abu Ja'far managed to refute al-Bilali's claim. Al-Tusi mentioned one person who abandoned his support of al-Bilali and took Abu Ja'far's side, and perhaps other supporters did likewise, because the existent sources do not refer to any trace of this split during the last years of the second *Safir*'s time in office, a fact which probably indicates that it had ended.

### **C) Muhammad b. Nusayr**

A third rival to Abu Ja'far for the office of the *sifara* was Muhammad b. Nusayr, who was not an ordinary Imamite, but belonged to the extremists, (al-Ghulat). It has been noted that some of the extremists, first during the time of the ninth Imam (such as Ja'far b. Waqid, Abu al-Ghamr and Hashim b. Abi Hashim), then during the time of the tenth and eleventh Imams (such as 'Ali b. Haska al-Hawwari al-Qummi and his students al-Qasim al-Sharani al-Yaqtini, al-Hasan b. Muhammad b. Baba al-Qummi and Muhammad b. Musa al-Shariqi or al-Shari'i), had claimed that they were the agents or the Gates (*Abwab*) of the Imam and had collected money from the ordinary believers. They also preached extremist ideas aimed at abolishing the Islamic rites, that is, the prayer, fast, *zakat* and pilgrimage.

According to Al-Kashshi their roots lay in the extremist doctrines of Ibn Abi al-Khattab<sup>25</sup>, the contemporary of the sixth Imam al-Sadiq. However, the presence of the Imams had limited the activities of the extremists, since the Imams used to have direct contacts with their followers and circulated open

letters of excommunication against false agents.

But the occultation of the Twelfth Imam enabled the *Ghulat* to extend their role as agents or Gates (*Abwab*) at the expense of the *Safīr*, since the *Safīr* could not refute their claim by declaring publicly that he was the true Imam's *Safīr*, a declaration which might put his life and the Imam's life in danger. For this reason, when al-'Askari died, Muhammad b. Musa al-Shari'i claimed – as has been noted – that he was the Gate (*Bab*) of the Imam.

According to al-Tusi, after the death of al-Shari'i, Muhammad b. Nusayr al-Numayri aspired to the office of the *Safīr*<sup>26</sup>.

This shows that both men may have been representatives of a single trend. According to Al-Kashshi, Ibn Nusayr had already claimed that he was the *Bab* of the tenth Imam<sup>27</sup>. Al-Tusi's account suggests that he had abandoned this claim during the lifetime of the eleventh Imam, al-'Askari. It seems that only after the death of the first *Safīr* did he dispute the legality of Abu Ja'far as the *Safīr* and claim that he was the *Bab* of the Twelfth Imam.

Therefore Abu Ja'far cursed and excommunicated him. Having been excommunicated, Ibn Nusayr tried to make Abu Ja'far change his mind, but he did not even receive him, so the Imamites excluded him from their community<sup>28</sup>.

Ibn Nusayr was encouraged in his claim by Muhammad b. Musa b. Furat, who belonged to the well-known family of Banu Furat<sup>29</sup>.

He was a well-known *muhaddith* in Kufa and Baghdad and seems to have been the first man from Banu Furat to hold an important administrative office in the 'Abbasid government<sup>30</sup>.

With the support of Banu Furat, Ibn Nusayr was able to circulate his claim amongst the Imamites, and, because of the participation of the two of them, their sect was known as "al-Numayriyya al-Furatiyya"<sup>31</sup>. The vast majority of their followers who came from Mada'in, and were called al-Ishaqiyya after one of their leaders, Ishaq b. Muhammad al-Ahmar<sup>32</sup>.

It appears that Ibn Nusayr's claims neither weakened Abu Jafar's position nor attracted any of his followers to Ibn Nusayr's side, so the latter's influence must have been limited mainly to the extremists.

According to al-Nawbakhti a certain Ahmad was supposed to have been designated as the successor of Ibn Nusayr, but a Nusayri work refers to a certain Muhammad b. Jundab as Ibn Nusayr's successor in the view of the majority of the Nusayriyya. It is said that he was in turn followed by Muhammad al-Junbulani<sup>33</sup>.

But this occurred at a later stage after the death of the second *Safīr* in 305/917, so it is beyond the topic of this section. However, it is worth mentioning that, from the time of second *Safīr* onwards, the followers of Ibn Nusayr separated themselves totally from the direct control of the second *Safīr*, Abu Ja'far, who in

the Imamite view was the only representative of the hidden Imam. Moreover the Nusayriyya gave more importance to the role of the *Bab* than to the Imam himself, which was proof enough to place them outside the circle of the Twelver Imamites.

## **2. The Activities of Abu Ja'far, the Second Saf'ir**

### **A) The Career of Abu Ja'far**

Despite the difficulties faced by Abu Ja'far because of the false agents Ibn Hilal, al-Bilali and Ibn Nusayr, he continued to direct the underground activities of the organization, extending its role amongst the Imamites. At the same time he followed in the first *Saf'ir's* footsteps by trying to prove the existence of the concealed Imam to the reliable Imamites. He sought to circulate amongst them the idea that the Imam's occultation had taken place because of divine intervention, that it was a vindication of the traditions related by the previous Imams, and that he, Abu Ja'far, was the rightful *Saf'ir* of the hidden Imam<sup>34</sup>.

Furthermore, he sought to make it possible to continue his duties without being harassed by his encouraging the belief of the authorities, originally fostered by the first *Saf'ir*, that al-'Askari had died without leaving a successor." He hoped that the government would therefore relax, content in the belief that an uprising was unlikely, because the Imamites no longer had an Imam to rally and lead them.

The dual plan of Abu Ja'far as regards the existence of the hidden Imam can be seen in several narrations. At one time, a certain Hamdan al-Qalansi asked Abu Ja'far about al-'Askari's successor. Abu Ja'far replied, "Al-'Askari has died, but he has left amongst you a successor whose neck is like this"<sup>35</sup>, and he indicated the size of his neck as a sign that al-'Askari's son had attained maturity.

According to al-Saduq, Abu Ja'far made the same statement to the well-known scholar 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far al-Himyari, when the latter asked him about al-'Askari's sons<sup>36</sup>. Furthermore on another occasion Abu Ja'far informed him as follows:

*"The Sahib al-Amr (the Imam) attends the pilgrimage every year and sees the people and knows them, while they see him but do not recognise him." He added that he had seen the Imam at al-Ka'ba holding its drapes and praying, "O Allah, avenge me against my enemies."* <sup>37</sup>

However, despite the fact that Abu Ja'far revealed the existence of the Twelfth Imam to al-Himyari, he warned him against trying to discover his name. The authorities were content that al-'Askari had died without leaving a successor<sup>38</sup>, but if they were to come to know the name of the Imam and his whereabouts, they would search for him and endanger both his life and the life of his agents<sup>39</sup>. Other reports indicate that the second *Saf'ir* instructed other agents similarly.

A careful study of the activities of the agents reveals that the second *Saf'ir* managed in fact to keep the existence of the hidden Imam secret from the 'Abbasids until the early years of the reign of al-Mu'tadid

(278–89/891–901).

Perhaps this was due to the wise instructions issued to his agents by Abu Ja'far who, as a part of his prudent fear (*Taqiyya*), carried out his activities unnoticed and in secret. Like his father before him he disguised himself as a butter-seller and acquired the nickname *a/\_Samman*<sup>40</sup>.

He used pseudonyms in his underground meetings with some of his agents. According to al-Kashshi, Abu Ja'far's name was Muhammad b. Hafs al-'Umari<sup>41</sup>, whereas his real name was Muhammad b. 'Uthman b. Sa'id, and it might be that the first name was a pseudonym.

Furthermore a careful study of the chain of transmitters (*asanid*) of the Prophetic traditions and the sayings of the Imams shows that there is no reference to his name as a narrator, whereas most of the *Tawqi'at* (written and signed answers or pronouncements) attributed to the eleventh and Twelfth Imams concerning legal matters came on the authority of Abu Ja'far<sup>42</sup>.

This fact reveals that he did not wish to implicate himself in any open discussions of religious matters, so that he could hide his real position amongst the Imamites from the government and convey communications between the hidden Imam and his followers, free from the interference of the authorities.

## **B) The Agents of the Second Safir in Baghdad**

It has been noted that the first *Safir* had three agents in Baghdad, Ahmad b. Ishaq, Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Qattan, and Hajiz al Washsha'. It appears that the responsibilities of the second *Safir*, Abu Ja'far, were greater than that of the first, since according to al-Tusi he had ten people beneath him in Baghdad. to run the affairs of the organization.

Amongst them was al-Husayn b. Ruh al-Nawbakhti, who later became the third *Safir*.<sup>43</sup> Al-Tusi does not name the other agents, but it is most likely that the three agents of the first *Safir* were amongst them, since these three served the organization in Baghdad during the time of the second *Safir*, who had direct contact with them<sup>44</sup>.

Al-Qattan was the most active amongst the agents in Baghdad. According to al-Saduq, he had seen the Imam<sup>45</sup>. Al-Kashshi describes his reliability when he relates that, "After Abu Ja'far, there was no one on earth closer to the origin (the Imam) than he"<sup>46</sup>, because he used to be the direct mediator between the Imam and the Imamites via the second *Safir*, although the Imamites had no knowledge whatsoever of his relationship with Abu Ja'far.

Perhaps for this reason a certain agent called al-Hasan b. al-Fadl, who used to deal with al-Qattan concerning legal affairs, thought that he was the *Safir*.<sup>47</sup>

The available sources make it rather difficult to detect the names of the rest of the agents in Baghdad,

particularly if one bears in mind the fact that Abu Ja'far continued in his office for about fifty years. It is therefore probable that some of the agents, like Ahmad b. Ishaq, al-Qattan and Hajiz, had died and been replaced by other agents. Ibn Rustam al-Tabari reports that Ahmad b. Ishaq died in Hilwan on his way to Qumm, but he does not fix the date of his death<sup>48</sup>.

According to al-Saduq, when Hajiz died his office was filled by Muhammad b. Ja'far al-Asadi al-Razi<sup>49</sup>. Al-Qattan seems to have continued his activities after the years 279–282/891–894, when the government tried to arrest him after discovering the existence of the Twelfth Imam<sup>50</sup>. He also carried out his activities during al-Mutadid's regime (279289/891–901),<sup>51</sup> but there is no reference to him after that period, which may indicate that he died around that date.

Al-Tusi gives several accounts of the last will of the second *Safir* in 305/917 which includes the names of the eminent agents at that time. He reports:

*"During Abu Ja'far's last illness, the heads of the Shi'a congregated around him. Among them were Abu 'Ali b. Humam, Abu 'Abd Allah b. Muhammad al-Kdtib, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Baqtani, Abu Sahl Isma'il b. 'Ali al-Nawbakhti, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Wajna, and other leaders. They asked him, "If something happens to you, who will succeed you?"*

*He said to them, "This is Abu al-Qasim al-Husayn b. Ruh b. Abi Bahr al-Nawbakhti. He will be in charge of my office and will be the safar between you and the Sahib al-Amr (the Imam), because he is his agent and is honest and trustworthy. So consult him in your matters, and depend on him in your needs, because I was ordered to announce this proclamation."*<sup>52</sup>

According to another narration Ibn Ruh and Ahmad b. Ja'far b. Matil were amongst those who attended this meeting. The agents thought that, in the case of the death of the second *Safir*, either Ja'far b. Ahmad b. Matil or his father would succeed him, because of their close relations with him<sup>53</sup>.

These two reports disclose the names of the chief agents of Baghdad around the year 304–5/916–7 and the fact that the agents Ahmad b. Ishaq, Hajiz and al-Qattan, who had been in office in Baghdad from the time of the first *Safir*, had died, as has already been mentioned. Likewise they show that some of the other agents from the time of the first *Safir* were still living and had been promoted to high ranks, like al-Baqtani and al-Wajna.<sup>54</sup>

### **C) The Relationship of the Second *Safir* to the Agents in the other Provinces**

Apart from his agents in Baghdad, Abu Ja'far had other agents in various provinces, who were mediators between the provincial Imamites and the Twelfth Imam in legal inquiries and the collecting of the khums.

He had three principal agents in Iraq. His agent in Kufa was Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Zajawzji, whose family had controlled this office since the time of the first *Safir* and who was to hold this office during the time of the third *Safir*.<sup>55</sup>

According to al-Tusi and al-Najashi, the Twelfth Imam also had contacts in Kufa with two people from the family of Zurara: Muhammad b. Sulayman (237–300/851 912),[56](#) and his uncle ‘Ali b. Sulayman, who died around the year 313/925.[57](#)

It seems that they were in fact cooperating with al-Zajawzji and were working under his instruction in their areas. The family of Zurara had been well-known for their allegiance to the Imams from the time of their great-grandfather Zurara b. A‘yun (d. 150/767), the companion of the Imams al-Baqir and al-Sadiq[58](#).

His grandson Sulayman had been the agent of the tenth Imam, al-Hadi, both in Kufa and Baghdad. Furthermore, Ahmad, the son of Muhammad b. Sulayman, worked during the time of the third *Saf’ir* under Ahmad al-Zajawzji[59](#), which indicates the close relationship between the latter and the family of Zurara.

In al-Ahwaz the deputyship of the Imam was still in the hands of Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Mahzayar. It is said that he received an order from the Imam to follow the instructions of the second *Saf’ir*.[60](#)

According to al-Saduq one member of this family, Muhammad b. ‘Ali b. Mahzayar, doubted the existence of the Twelfth Imam. His case was raised with the Imam, who issued a letter in which he confirmed that Allah would remove his doubt and lead him to recover his faith [61](#).

The second *Saf’ir* extended his activities to new areas. According to al-Saduq his main agents in Wasit were Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Ha‘iri and al-Hasan b. Muhammad b. Qatat al-Saydalani. The latter was the Imam’s agent for endowments (*wakil al-waqf*) in Wasit, and was contacted by the *Saf’ir* through Ja‘far b. Muhammad b. Matil[62](#).

Al-Mawsil was another area in which the second *Saf’ir* gained partisans, and al-Tusi mentions a certain Muhammad b. al-Fadl al-Mawsili, who had accepted Abu Ja‘far as the *Saf’ir* of the Imam[63](#). Abu Ja‘far himself succeeded in attracting some influential people to his side in that area. Al-Irbili reports that al-Husayn b. Hamdan (from the famous ruling family, the Hamdanids) became the governor of Qumm in 296/908.

After he had been dismissed from his office, he contacted the second *Saf’ir* in Baghdad. He paid him the khums on all the money he had earned while in office as a sign of his obedience to the Twelfth Imam. As a result of his belief, the rest of his family also converted to the Imamite doctrine[64](#).

In Samarra the agent was Abu al-Qasim al-Hasan b. Ahmad. According to al-Saduq, he had direct contact with both the second *Saf’ir* and the Imam[65](#).

Meanwhile all the affairs of the Imamites’ institutions in Iran were controlled by the agent of Rayy, Muhammad b. Ja‘far b. Muhammad al-Asadi al-Razi. He had direct contact with the second *Saf’ir* and previously he had been answerable only to the first *Saf’ir*. The other agents of the Iranian provinces

were instructed to pay the legal taxes to him.

He continued in this office until his death in 312/924.<sup>66</sup> According to al-Tusi, at this time al-Qasim b. al-'Ala was the agent of the second *Saf'ir* in Azerbaijan. He continued in his office until the time of the third *Saf'ir*, Ibn Ruh<sup>67</sup>.

The second *Saf'ir* carried out extensive secret activities with his agents, whom he used to meet in various districts of Baghdad. During the period of the caliph al-Mu'tadid (279–289/892–901) the agents from the remote provinces like Qumm used to contact the second *Saf'ir* and convey money and goods to him through traders who had no knowledge of the relationship between those who sent the goods and Abu Ja'far as the second *Saf'ir*. On the contrary they brought these goods from Qumm to Abu Ja'far thinking that he was involved with the traders only commercially<sup>68</sup>.

In his relations with his agents Abu Ja'far was careful to leave no trace which the authorities could use against him and which would jeopardise both his own life and that of the Imam. Al-Saduq reports a secret meeting between Abu Ja'far and Ibn Matil, one of the ten agents in Baghdad. Abu Ja'far took Ibn Matil to a ruin in al'Abbasiyya in Baghdad,<sup>69</sup> where he read a letter written to him by the Twelfth Imam and then tore it to pieces<sup>70</sup>.

To evade any government spies Abu Ja'far also did not implicate himself in any direct contact with agents from remote provinces. He used to order any person who brought letters or money to put them in a certain place, and he would give him no receipt<sup>71</sup>.

Another narration indicates that the second *Saf'ir* had established a complicated system of communications between himself and the agents in the Imamite areas. There seems to have been a secret code reserved for the *Saf'ir* and his agents, while the messengers were sometimes ignorant of both the contents of their messages and the code. For example, Abu Ja'far once sent messages to Samarra with one of his reliable partisans, but the messenger inserted a letter amongst the other messages without the *Saf'ir's* knowledge. In Samarra he received answers to all the letters except his own<sup>72</sup>.

The second *Saf'ir* sometimes dealt directly with certain agents with whom he had previously communicated indirectly. The career of Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Aswad is a good example of such a case. According to al-Saduq, al-Aswad used to bring the legal taxes for the Imam to Abu Ja'far, who commanded him to hand them over to the well-known scholar al-'Abbas b. Ma'ruf al-Qummi<sup>73</sup>, and did not offer him any receipt<sup>74</sup>.

However, we later find al-Aswad dealing directly with the second *Saf'ir* and the third *Saf'ir*, who both received in person the money which al-Aswad had collected from the Imamites<sup>75</sup>.

### **3. The Effect of the Shiite Revolutionary Activities upon the 'Abbasids' Attitude towards the Twelfth Imam**

**3.1)** The events of the second *Safir's* career suggest that he instructed his agents to avoid any act which might lead the government of the day to think that the Imamites still had political aspirations or that they had an Imam leading them secretly. Despite the fact that he directed the Imamites to maintain this policy, the political activities of the other Shiite groups, particularly the Zaydites, the *Qaramita* and the *Isma'ilis*, complicated the Imamites' relations with the 'Abbasids and made it difficult for them to keep the existence of the Twelfth Imam totally concealed from their opponents.

When the Zanj revolution (255–270/866–883) was taking place the situation of the Imamites was critical. The leader of that revolution, 'Ali b. Muhammad, traced his lineage to the brother of Imam al-Baqir, Zayd b. 'Ali. For this reason a considerable group of 'Alids joined his side and participated in his uprising from the year 257/871.<sup>76</sup>

In spite of the fact that the eleventh Imam, al-'Askari, had openly announced that the leader of the Zanj was not a member of the People of the House (*Ahl al-Bayt*),<sup>77</sup> the authorities considered this revolution to be linked with the 'Alids. According to al-Tabari, the collapse of the Zanj revolt in 270/883 was followed by governmental propaganda against the 'Alids in general. This attitude can be discerned in the poem of Yahya b. Muhammad al-Aslami, who praised the 'Abbasid leader al-Muwaffaq in 270/883 with this verse:

وينتلى كتاب الله في كل مسجد \* ويلقى دعاء الطالبين خاسيا

*And the Book of Allah is recited in every mosque, and the Talibiyin invite people to their cause in vain*<sup>78</sup>.

It is most likely that the 'Abbasid antagonism towards extreme Shi'ite groups extended also to the Imamites. According to al-Tusi, the Imamites were too frightened to express their doctrine openly between the years 270–273/883–887.<sup>79</sup>

Another factor which strained relations between the Imamites and the 'Abbasids was the discovery of the underground activities of the two *Isma'ilis* parties, the original *Isma'ilis* and the *Qaramita*<sup>80</sup>. Like the Imamites, the *Isma'ilis* had reported the Prophetic traditions stating that *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* would go into occultation as a preparatory action for his rising<sup>81</sup>.

However, they interpreted some of these traditions in a manner which would support their struggle to gain immediate success in North Africa (*al-Maghrib*). Thus they understood the tradition which states that *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* will appear when the sun rises from the place of its setting to mean that the *Qa'im* would rise in the west (*al-Maghrib*)<sup>82</sup>.

Furthermore they applied other traditions narrated by the Imamites about *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* to their own concealed leader, who had organized his followers into a strong underground movement and had commanded them to extend their activities into new areas by military means to prepare for his rising as *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*<sup>83</sup>.

According to Sa'd al-Ash'ari the number of the *Qaramita* increased in the villages around Kufa, and according to al-Nawbakhti, they gained about 100,000 partisans there<sup>84</sup>.

Afterwards they expanded their propaganda on the western shores of the Gulf and Yemen, where a large number of Arabs accepted their cause, thus helping them to become powerful. As a result of all this they announced their rebellion<sup>85</sup>, which according to al-Tabari occurred in the suburbs of Kufa in 278/891.<sup>86</sup>

In the occultation of the Twelfth Imam the Isma'ilis seem to have found a good opportunity to use the Imamite masses in their political struggle. According to Ibn al-Athir, the *Qaramita* missionary Yahya b. al-Mahdi went to Bahrain, which had a large Shi'ite population. In 281/894 he contacted an eminent Shiite leader, 'Ali b. al-Mu'alla b. Hamdan, and informed him that he had been sent by al-Mahdi to inform his followers that his rising was at hand.

'Ali b. al-Mu'alla was satisfied with the message and revealed it to the Shiites in the town of Qatif and other villages of Bahrain. They in turn accepted it and promised that they too would support *al-Mahdi* if he rose. By such means the *Qaramita* succeeded in circulating their propaganda among the Arab tribe of Qays and began to collect the *khums*.<sup>87</sup>

By using the same methods, they expanded their activities among the tribes of Asad, Tayy and Tamim in the Sawad; while in the desert of the Samawa, the tribe of Banu al-'Ulays, which used to protect the trade route between Kufa and Damascus, also joined their side<sup>88</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that the *Qaramita* took into consideration the sectarian beliefs and economic situation of the people with whom they worked. Therefore we find that their propaganda spread mainly among people who already had Shiite inclinations, such as the Qarmatiyyun, who had participated in the Zanj revolt<sup>89</sup>, and also among the people of the Sawad<sup>90</sup>, who wished to join the side of any rebel in order to improve their social and economic conditions.

There is evidence that the *Qaramita* permitted their followers to kill their opponents and confiscate their property<sup>91</sup>.

The Imamites seem to have been aware of the danger of such a principle, since the 'Abbasid government might accuse them of holding the same principle and it could be easy for it to attack them under this pretext.

Since both the *Qaramita* and the Imamites were Shiites and lived in the same areas, practicing the same

religious rites, expecting the rise of *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* in the near future, it was difficult for the government to differentiate between them without extensive and careful investigation.

**3.2)** The Twelfth Imam wanted to protect his followers from the influence of the *Qaramita* and make the government of the day differentiate between the *Qaramita* and his own adherents. Perhaps this is why he is said to have sent a letter to his second *Saf'ir*, in which he denounced and cursed Muhammad b. Abi Zaynab and his followers (the *Qaramita*).

He declared that he had no relations with them and ordered his 'followers' neither to have any discussion with them nor to attend their gatherings. The second *Saf'ir* circulated the pronouncement of the Imam among the Imamites via his agent Ishaq b. Ya'qub<sup>92</sup>.

It seems most likely that the Imamites obeyed the instructions in the pronouncement. According to Ibn al-Athir, a group of people from Kufa revealed to the Abbasid authorities the underground activities of the *Qaramita* in their area and informed them that they were inventing rules contrary to Islamic law, according to which it was permissible to murder any Muslim other than those who paid them an oath of allegiance.

Ibn al-Athir also reports that later a group of Talibiyyun fought beside the government against the *Qaramita* in Kufa<sup>93</sup>.

It is plausible that in both of these instances these groups were Imamites, and that these steps were part of their plan to make the 'Abbasids realize in a practical way that they were not responsible for the *Qaramita*'s activities.

However, there is evidence that the 'Abbasids paid no attention to the Imamite claims<sup>94</sup>. The period of al-Mu'tadid (279–289/892–901) was distinguished as one of oppression and pursuit for the Imamites. It was well known among the Sunni scholars like al-Ash'ari that the Imamites had achieved a consensus in respect of the prohibition of any militant revolution unless the Imam himself appeared and ordered them to such action<sup>95</sup>.

But the propaganda of the *Qaramita* concerning the rise of *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* seems to have encouraged the government to link their activities with the occultation of the Twelfth Imam and to consider them as a preparation for his rising. They were certainly encouraged in this direction by the fact that the cousin of the Twelfth Imam, Muhsin b. Ja'far b. 'Ali al-Hadi involved himself in the *Qaramita*'s rebellion in Damascus<sup>96</sup>.

This critical situation gave the opponents of the Imamites a vital weapon, which the viziers used not only against the Imamites but also against their own colleagues who were anti-Shi'ite<sup>97</sup>. In 278/891 the caliph, al-Mu'tamid, ordered the arrest of a member of the Imamite family Banu Furat who had held the office of *Diwan al-Sawad*. The family members hid themselves, but Abu Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Furat was still arrested<sup>98</sup>.

In the same time al-Mu'tamid appointed 'Ubayd Allah b. Sulayman, who was well-known for his anti-'Alid attitude<sup>99</sup>, to the office of the wizara<sup>100</sup>. If one can link the uprising of the *Qaramita* in 278/891 with these two steps – taking into account the attitude of 'Ubayd Allah b. Sulayman – one can claim that 'Ubayd Allah's appointment was part of the precautions taken by the 'Abbasids against Shiite activities in general.

Afterward, al-Mu'tadid carried out a careful investigation of Shiite underground cells in general. In 282/895 he discovered that Muhammad b. Zayd, the head of the Zaydite state in Tabaristan, was sending 32,000 dinars every year to Muhammad b. Ward al-'Attar so that he could distribute the money among the 'Alids in Baghdad, Kufa, Mecca and Medina<sup>101</sup>.

The continual investigations of al-Mutadid caused the arrest and murder of many 'Alids; according to al-Isfahani they were not *Qaramita*, but were simply persecuted under that pretext<sup>102</sup>.

As a result of these measures, the authorities realized that the Imamites had their own organization. According to al-Kulayni the spies of the vizier 'Ubayd Allah b. Sulayman discovered that the Imamites still had an Imam who guided their activities secretly. Al-Kulayni reports:

*"Al-Husayn b. al-Hasan al-'Alawi said that two intimates of Badr Hasani (the servant of the caliph) were talking and one of them said, 'Why, he (the Twelfth Imam) is collecting money and has agents, wukala'. Afterwards they named all the agents in all the districts. Then they reported this information to the vizier 'Ubayd Allah b. Sulayman, who endeavoured to arrest them.*

*But the caliph (al-Mu'tadid) told him to search for the place of this man (the Imam), because this matter was important. 'Ubayd Allah b. Sulaymdn said, 'Let us arrest the agents.' But the caliph said, 'No, but infiltrate among them some spies who are unknown (in their service to the government), and ask them to give money to the agents. Then arrest anyone who accepts the money.'* <sup>103</sup>

Al-Kulayni does not mention the date of this incident, but we know that 'Ubayd Allah b. Sulayman continued in the service to the caliph al-Mu'tadid until the year 288/900, so this incident must have taken place between the years 282–288/895–900.

It is clear from this report that the 'Abbasid spies had reached the conclusion that the eleventh Imam al-'Askari had in fact left a successor, who directed the underground activities of his agents; but they were unsure of his place of residence. So they tried to arrest some of his agents and partisans, hoping that by interrogating them they might also arrest the Twelfth Imam. For this reason, the caliph ordered that spies be sent with money to infiltrate amongst the agents.

However, it seems that the *Safir*'s network was so strong and worked so efficiently that his agents from near and far knew at once that the caliph and his vizier planned to act against them. Before the plan to arrest the agents of the Imam could be executed an order to stop the collection of taxes had gone out to almost every agent.

When a spy infiltrated as far as the main agent in Baghdad, Muhammad alQattan, and informed him that he had money and wanted to send it to the Imam, al-Qattan pretended that he knew nothing about this matter. The other agents acted similarly<sup>[104](#)</sup>.

It appears that the caliph failed to obtain any information from his spies. Therefore he decided to try to gather information by arresting the Imamites who came to visit the tomb of al-Hir, where al-Husayn was buried, and the tombs of Quraysh, where the seventh and the ninth Imams were buried.

However, according to the Imamite sources, this plan was revealed to the Imamites, and an order was sent out to both the families of Banu Furat and al-Barsiyyin, warning them not to visit the tombs of Quraysh in Baghdad."<sup>[105](#)</sup>

According to al-Rawandi, a report came to the caliph revealing that the Twelfth Imam was staying in the house of his father in Sdmarra. The caliph did not want knowledge of his information to reach the hands of the Imamites, so he himself dispatched three of his personal soldiers to Samarra.

He described the house of al-'Askari to them and commanded them to enter it and kill whomever they found inside, but he did not reveal to them the name of the person whom they were going to murder. However, the Twelfth Imam managed to evade the soldiers, and they returned to the capital<sup>[106](#)</sup>.

The hostile 'Abbasid attitude towards the agents of the second *Saf'ir* continued after 'Ubayd Allah b. Sulayman's death in 288/900. His office was given to his son al-Qasim. The latter was well-known in his hatred toward the Imamites and the Shiites in general. Throughout his service in office he followed the same policies of his father towards the Imamites and showed more malevolence.

Al-Tusi gives a report supporting this point: Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah of Qumm, who had seen the Imam and had obvious Imamite inclinations, attracted the attention of the vizier al-Qasim b. 'Ubayd Allah. On several occasions he tried to murder him, so he finally fled to Egypt<sup>[107](#)</sup>.

According to Ibn al-Jawzi, al-Qasim arrested many innocent 'Alids on the pretext that they had Qarmatian inclinations, and they remained in jail until 291/903.<sup>[108](#)</sup>

The continual campaigns of arrest carried out by the 'Abbasids and the ill-effects of the *Qaramita* uprisings made the Imam and his agents even more careful. According to Abu Sahl al-Nawbakhti the correspondence between the Imam and the *Saf'ir* stopped about this time<sup>[109](#)</sup>, probably in order to erase any traces which might lead the authorities to them.

As another precautionary measure from the reign of al-Mu'tadid onwards the Imam changed his place of residence several times. Reports mentioned by al-Tusi indicate that, in an unspecified year, a certain agent told Abu Sawra that he was going to the Maghrib to meet the Imam. Someone else saw him in Syria and another met him in Egypt<sup>[110](#)</sup>.

Yet another report states that the 'Imam was resident in the mountains near Mecca about the year

293/905.<sup>111</sup> According to the second *Saf'ir*, the Imam used to perform the pilgrimage every year<sup>112</sup>. All these narrations would seem to indicate that the Imam did not stay in one place for more than a short time, perhaps fearing that the authorities would discover his identity and plot against his life.

**3.3)** The *Qaramita*'s use of the Prophetic traditions predicting the rise of *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* in their struggle to gain immediate political success may have made the Imamites give greater emphasis to the physical signs which would precede the rise of *al-Qa'im* as mentioned in the Prophetic traditions and the statements of the Imams.

Al-Kulayni, who was a contemporary to the second *Saf'ir*, and his student al-Nu'mani narrate, as has been mentioned before, five signs which must precede the rise of the real *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*:

(1) *al-Sufyani will rise in Syria and dominate it for only nine months.*

(2) *At the same time a rebel called al-Yamani (al-Qahtani)<sup>113</sup> will start a rebellion and advance towards Mecca.*

(3) *Afterwards the pure soul, a descendant of al-Hasan, will revolt in Medina. Its inhabitants will kill him and send his head to al-Sufyani.*

(4) *He will dispatch an army against Medina, but God will cause it to sink into the ground in the vicinity of the city.*

(5) *Thereupon in the morning an outcry in the sky will announce the full name of al-Qa'im al-Mahdi, who accordingly will rise in Mecca. These events will take place consecutively within one year.<sup>114</sup>*

It is clear from the Imamite presentation of these signs that they considered them a refutation of the claims of the Isma'ili leader who called himself al-Mahdi after his rising in 296/908.<sup>115</sup>

The emphasis which was given to these signs served to prevent the ordinary Imamites from involving themselves in Shiite activities with which the Imamite organization (*al-Wikala*) was not involved. This view is confirmed by the fact that around this period many traditions were being related and attributed to the previous Imams warning the Imamites not to participate in any revolution before the rise of *al-Qa'im*<sup>116</sup>.

The circulation of these traditions led people to feel that they should live peaceably and not involve themselves in any activities which might lead to revolution. This conclusion along with the five signs of the rise of *al-Qa'im*, encouraged some Imamites to put forward the idea that the establishment of the state of the People of the House (*Ahl al-Bayt*) is the responsibility of *al-Qa'im* himself and that any militant decision must be delayed until the rise of *al-Qa'im*.

In fact these traditions were intended as warnings against taking part in militant activities led by false claimants. But because of the way people interpreted them, very little attention was given to the

traditions which encouraged the people to prepare for the rise of the Twelfth Imam after his occultation. It is reported that the tenth Imam said,

*"If your Imam goes into occultation, expect freedom from grief (to come from) beneath your feet."*<sup>117</sup>

It is clear that the above statement of al-Hadi meant that it is the responsibility of every follower of the hidden Imam to prepare for the rise of their Imam by their own efforts.

It is most likely that this quiescent approach was encouraged by the Imamite scholars, whose role increased during the time of the second *Saf'ir*.<sup>118</sup> These people trained the ordinary Imamites to follow the instructions of the narrators during the occultation of the Imam. They were aided in achieving this aim by a statement attributed to the Twelfth Imam:

*"Concerning the occurrences which will happen, consult the narrators of our traditions, because they are my proof towards you, and I am the Proof of Allah."*<sup>119</sup>

It appears that by such methods the Imamite narrators were able to prevent the Imamite masses from taking part in the militant activities of the *Qaramita*. However, this quiescent attitude, which was only a precautionary measure taken against the Isma'ilis, developed later into the fundamental approach towards the question of the rise of *al-Qa'im*.

## **4. The Death of Abu Ja'far**

It is reported that the second *Saf'ir* prophesied the time of his death and prepared his own gravestone upon which Qur'anic verses and the names of the Imams were inscribed. He died in 305/917<sup>120</sup> and was buried in his house on the road leading to Kufa, on the western side of Baghdad.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> T. al-Ghayba, 230–1, 233, 236; Kama'l, 432.

<sup>2.</sup> T. al-Ghayba, 235; Kama'l, 510.

<sup>3.</sup> T. al-Fihrist, 50–1; T. Tahdhib al-Ahkam, IV, 134; T. al-Ghayba, 100–1. Most of the narrations attributed to Ibn Hilal come on the authority of Sad al-Ash'ari al-Qummi, which reveals that Ibn Hilal had a high position among the Imamites before he was excommunicated by the Saf'irs (Ikhtiyar, 18, 141, 503, 603). For the narration concerning the twelfth Imam being *al-Qa'im* related on the authority of Ibn Hilal, see Kama'l, 252–3, 350, 649; al-Kafi, I, 342; N. al-Ghayba, 175, 100–1, 149, 283.

<sup>4.</sup> Ikhtiyar, 535.

<sup>5.</sup> al-Sadr, op. cit., I, 501.

<sup>6.</sup> al-Najashi, 65.

<sup>7.</sup> al-Saduq, Mashyakhat al-Faqih, IV, 128. Al-Nasb literally means to declare war on someone, or to show open hostility to someone. In the Shi'ite works the term al-nasb has been used to define a doctrine of a group of people called al-Nawasib (pl. of nasib). The Nawasib were mainly distinguished by their hostility towards the People of the House (Ahl al-Bayt). Al-Kulayni considers Ahmad, the son of the 'Abbasid vizier 'Ubayd Allah b. Khaqan, as one of them, and adds that *al-Qa'im* would order them to pay the jizya (al-Kafi, I, 503, 508, VIII, 227, 101, 160–1). The Khawarij were amongst the Nawasib and al-Tusi considered them as infidels (kuffar) and forbade the Shiites from having any social relations with them.

Furthermore, he permitted the Imamites to confiscate their money; al-Tusi, Tahdhib al-Ahkam, IV, 22; al-Istibsar, III, 183–4.

8. T. al-Fihrist, 50–1; al-Tabarsi, *al-Ihtijaj*, II, 289.
9. T. al-Ghayba, 260.
10. Kama'l, 489; al-Sadr, op. cit., I, 500.
11. Ikhtiyar, 536–7.
12. Ikhtiyar, 537.
13. According to the Imamites, Islam is based on five pillars: prayer, zakat, fasting, pilgrimage, and the Wilaya, that is, the recognition of the Imam, to which they gave priority over the pillars. Therefore if a person spends all his life performing the other four Islamic pillars but does not recognize the Imam, his worship is invalid. For a full account of this point, see al-Kafi, I, 181–4, 374–5, II, 18–19.
14. T. al-Ghayba, 260.
15. Al-Dihqan is 'Urwa b. Yahya al-Nakhkhas al-Baghdadi; he is said to have been the wakil and treasurer of the eleventh Imam, al-'Askari. But he was deposed and cursed because he seized the money of the organization and burnt the documents of the Imam, which were kept in the treasury; Ikhtiyar, 573, 579.
16. Ikhtiyar, 536–7.
17. T. al-Ghayba, 260.
18. al-Najashi, 254–5; Ikhtiyar, 564, 566.
19. al-Barqi, al-Rijal, 57, 61.
20. Al-Kashshi mentions a document attributed to al-'Askari containing instructions to his agents in Iraq and Khurasan, in which he ordered Ishaq al-Nisaburi to contact al-Bilali in Baghdad; Ikhtiyar, 579.
21. al-Kafi I, 328; Kama'l, 499.
22. T. al-Ghayba, 260.
23. T. al-Ghayba, 261.
24. T. al-Ghayba, 261.
25. Ikhtiyar, 517–21, 528–9.
26. T. al-Ghayba, 259. Javad Ali and Rajkowski think that Ibn Nusayr was an eminent citizen of Basra. Moreover the latter thinks that he was of Persian origin. However, both base their accounts on al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (al-Khatib, III, 163–4) and Al-Kashshi, whereas the latter refers to two people bearing the same name. The first one was his teacher in Basra and the second was the above extremist. Al-Kashshi attributed the latter lineage to the Arab tribe Fahr and criticized him bitterly; Ikhtiyar, 5, 278, 503, 520.
27. Ikhtiyar, 520–1.
28. T. al-Ghayba, 259.
29. N. Furat, 78. Al-Sabi reports that Banu Furat used to inhabit a village called Babili Sasfrin in the district of upper Nahrawan, and that there were more than 300 people in this village (Hilal b. Muhsin al-Sabi, *al-Wizara* [Cairo, 1958], 11–12). They named themselves after their great-grandfather, Furat b. Ahnaf al-'Abdi, who had lived and died in Kufa around 120/737 and was a close associate of al-Sajjad and al-Baqir (al-Barqi, al-Rijal, 8–9, 16). Another member of this family was 'Umar b. Furat, who was executed on the orders of Ibrahim b. al-Mahdi in 203/808, as a punishment inflicted on him for his propaganda in favour of the vizier Ibn Sahl. See for details, D. Sourdel, "Ibn al-Furat", E.I. 2; Rajkowski, op. cit., 769–70.
30. al-Khatib, III, 163–4; al-Sabi, op. cit., 30–31.
31. Rajkowski, op. cit., 772–3, quoted from al-Khasibi, *Diwan*, f. 49b, 4, 5a.
32. al-Khatib, VI, 380; Salih Ahmad al-'Ali, "al-Mada'in fi al-Masadir al-'Arabiyya", *Sumar*, XIII (1967), 50.
33. Javad Ali, op. cit., in *Der Islam*, XXV (1939), 206.
34. T. al-Ghayba, 233–4.
35. al-Kafi, I, 329, 331.
36. Kama'l, 435.
37. Kama'l, 440.
38. Kama'l, 442..
39. al-Kafi, I, 330.

- [40.](#) Abu al-Fida, op. cit., II, 69; al-Kamil, VIII, 80; T. al-Ghayba, 192.
- [41.](#) Ikhtiyar, 532.
- [42.](#) al-Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj, II, 297–301.
- [43.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 240.
- [44.](#) Concerning the activities of al-Qattan, see al-Kafi, 520; T. al-Ghayba, 190–1; Bihar, LI, 302, 217; Kama'l, 409–1; al-Irshad, 398–9. For Hajiz's relations with the Saf'ir, see Bihar, LI, 294, and for Ahmad b. Ishaq's contacts with the Saf'ir and other agents, see Dala'il, 272; Ikhtiyar, 556–7.
- [45.](#) Kama'l, 442.
- [46.](#) Ikhtiyar, 535.
- [47.](#) al-Irshad, 399.
- [48.](#) Dala'il, 272 According to al-Sadnq, Ahmad b. Ish'aq died in Hilwan before 260/874, but this cannot be accepted because there are several indications that he outlived al-'Askari (d. 260/874). Moreover al-Saduq relates his report on the authority of Muhammad b. Bahr, who was well-known for fabricating narrations; Kama'l, 454, 466–7; al-Najashi, 298.
- [49.](#) Kama'l, 488.
- [50.](#) al-Kafi, I, 525.
- [51.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 191–2.
- [52.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 242.
- [53.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 240– 241.
- [54.](#) According to Ibn Rustam, after the death of al-'Askari in 260/874, al-Baqtani claimed that he was the agent of the twelfth Imam (Bihar, LI, 300). But later he appears to have abandoned his claim and served both the second and third Saf'irs (T. al-Ghayba, 242). Al-Wajna' was amongst those who had seen the Imam (Kama'l, 443). He was resident in Baghdad during the time of the second Saf'ir (al-Kaf, I, 521). However it appears that he had some relations with the political bases of the Imamites in Mosul in 307/919; T. al-Ghayba, 205.
- [55.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 198.
- [56.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 193, 195.
- [57.](#) al-Najashi, 198; Buzurg, Nawabigh al-Ruwat, 186.
- [58.](#) N. al-Ghayba, 179; Mizan, II, 69–70, 399; Buzurg, Nawabigh al-Ruwat, 53–55, 161–3; al-Najashi, 132–3.
- [59.](#) al-Khirsan, Sharh Mashyakhat TahdhTb al-Ahkam (Najaf, 1963), 13–16.
- [60.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 235.
- [61.](#) Kama'l, 485.
- [62.](#) Kama'l, 504.
- [63.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 205–6.
- [64.](#) al-Irbili, Kashf al-Ghumma, IV, 409; Bihar, LI, 56–7; al-Irbili does not mention the year in which Ibn Hamdan controlled Qumm; however, Ibn al-Athir reports that he was installed in this post in 296/908. Consequently the contact between the second Saf'ir and Ibn Hamdan must have occurred after that date; al-Kamil, VIII, 14, 32.
- [65.](#) Kama'l, 493, 495.
- [66.](#) Kama'l, 488, 486; Bihar, LI, 294, 325.
- [67.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 202.
- [68.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 192– 193.
- [69.](#) Al-'Abbasiyya was a fief in Baghdad granted to al-'Abbas, the brother of the caliph al-Mansur. According to al-Khatib al-Baghdadi there were two fiefs of the same name, one on the eastern side of Baghdad and the other on the western side. Because the house of Abu Ja'far was on the western side, the meeting may have occurred there; al-Khatib, I, 79, 95.
- [70.](#) Kama'l, 498.
- [71.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 192.
- [72.](#) Kama'l, 499.
- [73.](#) Al-'Abbas b. Ma'ruf was a companion to the tenth Imam, al-Hadi. He devoted his time during the short occultation to relating Imamite narrations; therefore, perhaps, Abu Ja'far originally ordered al-Aswad to hand the money over to Ibn Ma'ruf because al-Aswad, at that time, was not aware of the necessity of the underground organization. For a full account

of the career of Ibn Ma'ruf as a narrator of Imamite narrations which criticise those Shiites who considered Ibn al-Hanafiyya or the seventh Imam Musa al-Kazim, as the hidden Imam, see *Ikhtiyar*, 315, 461; *al-Najashi*, 215–6, 151; *al-Tusi*, *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*, IV, 122, 137, V, 292, VI, 122, 194.

[74.](#) *Kama'l*, 502.

[75.](#) *T. al-Ghayba*, 241.

[76.](#) Tabari, III, 1857, 2024, 2109; for a full account of the Zanj revolt see the two important articles by Naji, "Tariikh al-Tabari Masdar'an 'an Thawrat al-Zanj", *al-Mawrid* VII, No. 2 (1978), 37–92; and "al-Tanzim al-'Askari li jaysh Sahib al-Zanj", *al-Mu'arikh al-'Arabi*, VII (1978), 116–157; *Faysal al-Samir*, *Thawrat al-Zanj* (Basra, 1952).

[77.](#) *al-Irbili*, *Kashf al-Ghumma*, IV, 428; *Bihar*, L, 293.

[78.](#) *al-Tabari*, *Tareekh*, 8 vols., (Beirut, Mu'assasah al-'Alami lil-Matboo'aat, 4th ed., 1403), vol. 8, pg. 145

[79.](#) *Al-Tusi* reports that the tomb of al-Husayn collapsed in 273/886 probably due to an act of sabotage, especially if one bears in mind the fact that an attack upon the grave of 'Ali was foiled about the same time; *al-Tusi*, *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*, VI, 111–12.

[80.](#) For the distinction between the Mubarakiyya and the Qaramita, see *Q. Maqalat*, 80–6; *N. Firaq*, 67–74; *al-Fusul al-Mukhtara*, 247–8.

[81.](#) *T. al-Ghayba*, 39, 130. The Isma'ilī writer Ibn Hawshab narrates in *al-Kashf* several Qur'anic verses about the Last Day, which for him means the rise of al-Qa'im al-Mahdi (*al-Kashf* 5–6, 10, 11, 14, 24; Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, *Kashf al-Mahjub* (Teheran, 1949, 81–3). Moreover, Ibn Hawshab mentions a narration attributed to al-Sadiq, stating that al-Qa'im will rise in Mecca. Thus he agrees with the Imamite reports regarding this point; *al-Kashf* 32–5.

[82.](#) Ibn Hawshab, *Asrar al-Nutaqa'*, 51–3, 90–2. For the details of the Isma'ilī use of these traditions in their activities with the tribe of Kitama in 280/893, see *al-Kamil*, VIII, 24–5, 26.

[83.](#) Ibn Hawshab, *al-Kashf* 62; *al-Kamil*, VIII, 22–3; Ivanow supports this point in suggesting that "the terrible slaughter of the pilgrims in the Ka'ba itself, and the seizure of the sacred relics were not acts of wanton cruelty, but were connected with some expectations of a religious character, such as the return of Muhammad b. Isma'il in full glory, etc., which most probably was expected to be due about that time." Ivanow, "Ismailis and Qarmatians", *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, XVI (1940), 82; also see W. Madelung, "Karmati", E.I.2.

[84.](#) *N. Firaq*, 76; *al-Tabari* confirms this number; *Tabari*, II, 2218.

[85.](#) *Q. Maqalat*, 86.

[86.](#) *Tabari*, III, 2124.

[87.](#) *al-Kamil*, VII, 340–1, VIII, 21–2. There is evidence which encourages the present writer to link the activities of the Qaramita with those of the Ismailis. Ibn Hawqal mentions that after the establishment of the Qaramita state in Bahrain they used to send the khums to the Sahib al-Zaman, that is the Ismaili leader in Egypt; Ibn Hawqal, op. cit., 21–3.

[88.](#) *Tabari*, III, 2218; Ibn Hawqal, op. cit., 29.

[89.](#) *Tabari*, III, 1757. Shaban put forward the theory that the Isma'ilī movement in Iraq and Bahrain was called the Qaramita after a specific race called al-Qaramatiyyun. They came originally from Libya and they could hardly speak Arabic. They took part in the Zanj revolt and joined the Ismaili movement when the revolt collapsed. (Shaban, op. cit., 130).

[90.](#) *Tabari*, III, 2202.

[91.](#) *Maqalat*, 85.

[92.](#) *Kama'l*, 483, 485.

[93.](#) *al-Kamil*, VIII, 311, 376.

[94.](#) *Tabari*, III, 2127–8; *al-Kamil*, VII, 311.

[95.](#) *al-Ash'ari*, *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin*, 58; *Ibn Shadhan*, *al-Idah*, 475.

[96.](#) Later in 300/912 Muhsin was arrested in the suburbs of Damascus. His head was sent to Baghdad, where it was impaled on a bridge in the eastern side of the city, an area which was inhabited by a large Shiite population; *Maqatil*, 449; *al-Kubaysi*, op. cit., 446.

[97.](#) 'Ali b. Isa, who was known for his anti-'Alid attitude, was called a Qarmati by his personal enemies; as a result he was dismissed from office ('Arib, op. cit., 59). Al-Qasim al-Khaqani was discharged in the same manner. Later al-Hallaj was arrested on the accusation that he was a Qarmatian missionary; *Nujum*, III, 182; *Ibn Taymiyya*, *Aami' al-Rasa'il*, I, 188.

[98.](#) al-Sabi, *al-Wuzara*, 292–3; Tabari, III, 2123.

[99.](#) al-Kamil, VII, 333.

[100.](#) Tabari, III, 2123. ‘Ubayd Allah b. Sulayman was a close associate of al-Muwaffaq in Samaria in 264/878, but four years later he was imprisoned. When al-Mu’tadid became the heir-apparent to al-Mu’tamid, ‘Ubayd Allah was promoted to the office of the wizara, whereupon he used his office to pursue his rivals such as Bann Furat. At the same time he managed to uncover the activities of the agents of the second Safir. He died in 288/900; al-Kafi, I, 525; al-Kamil, VII, 219, 227, 309; al-Fakhri, 302.

[101.](#) Tabari, III, 2148; al-Muntazam, V, 150.

[102.](#) Al-Isfahani mentions that two ‘Alids, Muhammad b. ‘Ali b. Ibahim and ‘Ali b. Muhammad b. ‘Ali, were tortured along with the Qarmati Sahib al-Kahl, whose hands and legs were cut off, yet they did not support the Qaramita nor did they have any relations with them (*Maqatil*, 446). Al-Tabari states twice that the ‘Abbasid troops arrested a group of Qaramita in 286/899 and investigated them. They disclosed the name of their leader, Abu Hashim b. Sadaqa al-Katib, who was arrested and put in jail (Tabari III, 2179). Al-Mu’tadid’s investigation of the Qaramita leader, Abu al-Fawaris, shows that he differentiated between the doctrine of the Qaramita and the Imamites; al-Kamil, VII, 354

[103.](#) al-Kafi, I, 525.

[104.](#) al-Kafi, I, 525.

[105.](#) al-Kafi, I, 525; al-Irshad, 402; T. al-Ghayba, 183–4. This order is believed to have come from the Imam himself.

[106.](#) al-Rawandi, *al-Khara’ij wa-l-Jara’ih* (Bombay, 1301), 67. Al-Tusi mentions the names of two of the three soldiers: Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allah and Rashiq, the servant of al-Mu’tadid. It appears that al-Tusi’s report is sound, because al-Tabari confirms that Rashiq was the personal soldier (*ghulam, khadim*) of al-Mu’tadid and took part in the fighting against the Zanj revolution; Tabari III, 1953, 2003, 2007, 2017–9, 2082–3; T. al-Ghayba, 160–1.

[107.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 163–5.

[108.](#) Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntazam*, VI, 46.

[109.](#) Kama’l, 92–3, quoted from *Kitab al-Tanbih* by Abu Sahl al-Nawbakhti.

[110.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 166, 195–6.

[111.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 166, 165.

[112.](#) Kama’l, 440.

[113.](#) The Prophet’s companion ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Amr b. al-As used to narrate a Prophetic tradition predicting the rise of al-Qahtani, whose rising is only a sign for the rise of al-Qa’im al-Mahdi. However, Mu’awiya prohibited this companion from narrating the tradition, because he thought that the spread of such traditions would encourage the people to overthrow him; B. Sahih, 384.

[114.](#) al-Kafi, VIII, 209, 264, 265, 274, 310, 331; from 273/886 onward ‘Ali b. al-Husayn al-Taymali used to narrate other signs of al-Qa’im’s uprising (N. al-Ghayba, 131, 164; Kama’l, 649–656; al-Hadrami, Asl Ja’far b. Shurayh al Hadrami, f. 37a, 39a, 48a).

[115.](#) Tabari, III, 2225.

[116.](#) Al-Numani devotes a section of his work *al-Ghayba* to the refutation of the claims of the Isma’iliis (N. al-Ghayba, 53–7, 176–80); al-Kulayni reports a narration on the authority of al-Sadiq, forbidding his follower ‘Umar b. Hanzala from taking part in any ‘Alid revolution before the outcry in the sky; al-Kafi, VIII, 310. See also Ikhtiyar, 262–3.

[117.](#) Bihar, LI, 161.

[118.](#) For a full account of the increase of the role of the Imamite fuqaha’, see Chapter VII.

[119.](#) Kama’l, 484.

[120.](#) Al-Tusi gives two dates for the death of Abu Ja’far, the first of which, 304/916, is on the authority of the grandson of Abu Ja’far, Hibat Allah. The second report attributed to Abu Ghalib al-Zurari, the agent of Ibn Ruh in Kufa puts the date at 305/917. Because the latter had close relations with Abu Ja’far and was his contemporary, it seems that his report is more likely to be accurate; T. al-Ghayba, 238–9; al-Kamil, VIII, 80; Abu al-Fida, *al-Mukhtasar*, II, 69.

[121.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 238–9. On the eastern side of Baghdad there is a tomb situated in a mosque called al-Khullani. The people believe that it is the grave of Abu Ja’far. Since al-Tusi mentions that his grave is on the western side it is possible that his corpse was transported to the new grave, but there is no available source to support such a claim.

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/occultation-twelfth-imam-historical-background-jassim-m-hussain/underground-activities-second-safir#comment-0>