

[Home](#) > [The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam \(A Historical Background\)](#) > [The Underground Activities of the Twelfth Imam as seen in the Actions of the Saf'irs](#) > 7. The Death of the First Saf'ir

The Underground Activities of the Twelfth Imam as seen in the Actions of the Saf'irs

1. A Brief Study of the Wikala Before the Twelfth Imam

As mentioned in Chapter Two, a critical situation the Imams faced, brought about by the 'Abbasids, forced the Imams to search for a new means to communicate with the members of their congregation. The Imamite sources indicate that the sixth Imam al-Sadiq was the first Imam to employ an underground system of communication (*alTanzim al-Sirri*) among his community¹.

The main purpose of the *Wikala* was to collect the *khums*, the *zakat*, and other kinds of alms for the Imam from his followers. Although the *Wikala* may have had other purposes at that time, the sources rarely record them. Al-Sadiq directed the activities of the organization with such care that the 'Abbasids were not aware of its existence.

As part of his prudent fear (*al-Taqiyya*), he used to ask some of his followers to carry out certain tasks for the organization without informing them that they were in fact his agents. Al-Tusi reports that Nasr b. Qabus al-Lakhmi spent twenty years working as an agent (*wakil*) for al-Sadiq, without knowing that he had actually been appointed as one.

Al-Sadiq's most important agent in Iraq was 'Abd al-Rahman b. al-Hajjaj, who continued in this office until his death, after the time of the eighth Imam al-Riḍa².

Mu'alla b. Khunays was al-Sadiq's agent in Medina. In 133/750 he was arrested by the 'Abbasids and sentenced to death because he refused to reveal the names of the Imamite propagandists³.

Despite the difficulties which faced the *Wikala* in its early stages, the areas covered by the agents and their training were extended during the time of al-Kazim as activities were intensified. The rite of pilgrimage was used as a means to communicate with each other. Al-Kazim's agent in Egypt was 'Uthman b. 'Isa al-Rawwasi⁴.

He also had agents in numerous other places, such as Hayyan al-Sarraj in Kufa, Muhammad b. Abi 'Umayr in Baghdad, and Yunis b. Ya'qub al-Bajli in Medina⁵. Al-Mas'udi's report suggests that all the agents received their instructions from 'Abd al-Rahman b. al-Hajjaj, who was then resident in Baghdad⁶.

The agents faced another campaign of arrests in 179/795 instigated by the caliph al-Rashid. It caused the Imamite organization considerable damage. The agent in Baghdad, Muhammad b. Abi 'Umayr, was arrested and tortured in the unfulfilled hope that he would reveal the names and locations of al-Kazim's followers, while his sister was put in jail for four years⁷.

Another agent, 'Ali b. Yaqtin, who used to send money and letters to the Imam through an individual called Isma'il b. Salam, was also arrested and spent the rest of his life in prison⁸. According to the Imamite sources the campaign of arrests led to the arrest of al-Kazim himself and to his death in prison⁹. Sixty other 'Alids also died under torture in prison¹⁰.

After the death of al-Kazim the members of the Imamite organization found themselves faced with an internal theological and political question involving the doctrine of *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* and his occultation. Al-Kazim's agents, such as al-Rawwasi in Egypt, Ziyad al-Qindi in Baghdad, 'Ali b. Abi Hamza and Hayyan al-Sarraj in Kufa, and al-Hasan b. Qayama in Wasit, had received many traditions attributed to al-Sadiq concerning *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* and his occultation, but these traditions did not explicitly state his identity¹¹.

Perhaps for this reason, they applied these traditions to the seventh Imam al-Kazim by denying his death and contending that he was *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*, but that he had gone into occultation¹².

Consequently, they rejected the Imamate of his son al-Riqa and split into a new group called the *Waqifa*, using the money of the organization to their own ends. As a result al-Riqa lost a considerable number of trained agents and over 100,000 dinars¹³.

Between the years 183-202/799-817 al-Riqa managed to solve this problem at least partially by clarifying to the members of the *Waqifa* the true nature of *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*, as transmitted on the authority of the previous Imams. According to al-Kashshi, he seems to have been able to persuade some of the members of the *Waqifa*, like al-Rawwasi and his followers to recognize his Imamate¹⁴.

Meanwhile the role of the *Wikala* was expanded to embrace the new needs and tasks of the congregation. Al-Riqa's agents were 'Abd al-'Aziz b. al-Muhtadi in Qumm¹⁵, Safwan b. Yahya in Kufa¹⁶, 'Abd Allah b. Jandab and 'Abd al-Rahman b. al-Hajjaj in Baghdad¹⁷.

Along with another eighty agents 'Abd al-Rahman b. al-Hajjaj controlled the leadership of the organization through the time of the ninth Imam, al-Jawad¹⁸, who achieved considerable success in protecting the organization from new schisms. Moreover the tactics of his agents developed in new directions especially in widening the sphere of *al-Taqiyya* (prudent fear) by allowing some of his

partisans to participate in the administration and the army of the 'Abbasids. [19](#)

During the long Imamate of the tenth Imam, al-Hadi (220–254/835–868) new trends emerged amongst the Imamites due to historical circumstances, trends which were later to play a dangerous role during the time of the Twelfth Imam.

As was pointed out above (Ch. II), al-Mutawakkil practiced the policy of al-Ma'mun, who had made al-Riḡa and his son al-Jawad join his courtiers so that their links with their partisans could be restricted and closely watched. Al-Mutawakkil did the same with al-Hadi. In 233/847 he summoned him, from Medina to Samarra, where he spent the rest of his life [20](#).

The absence of direct contact between the Imam and his followers led to an increase in the religious and political role of the *Wikala*, so that the agents of the Imam gained more authority in running its affairs. Gradually the leadership of the *Wikala* became the only authority which could determine and prove the legitimacy of the new Imam.

For example the ninth Imam, al-Jawad, gave his testament concerning his successor to his chief agent Muhammad b. al-Faraj. He told him that in case he should die, he should take his orders from al-Hadi [21](#).

When al-Jawad died in 220/835 the prominent leaders of the organization held a secret meeting at the house of Muhammad b. al-Faraj to determine the next Imam, who was proved to be al-Hadi [22](#).

The agents of the Imam gradually gained a great deal of experience in organizing their partisans into separate units. Several reports suggest that the agents divided their followers into four separate groups according to area. The first included Baghdad, Mada'in, Sawad and Kufa, the second Basra and al-Ahwaz, the third Qumm and Hamadan, and the fourth the Hijaz, Yemen and Egypt.

Each area was entrusted to an independent agent, beneath whom many local agents were appointed. The workings of this system can be observed in letters of instruction attributed to al-Hadi concerning the organization's administration. It is reported that he sent a letter in 232/847 to his local agent, 'Ali b. Bilal, saying:

"I have substituted Abu 'Ali b. Rashid for 'Ali b. al-Husayn b. 'Abd Rabba. I have entrusted him with this post since he is sufficiently qualified so that no one can take precedence over him. He has been informed that you are the chief (shaykh) of your own area, since I wished to invest you with that area. However, you have to follow him and hand all the revenues to collect over to him."

In a letter to his agents in Baghdad, Mada'in and Kufa, al-Hadi wrote,

"O Ayyub b. Nuh, I am commanding you to cut off relations between yourself and Abu 'Ali. Both of you should engage yourselves with what you have been entrusted and ordered to do in your areas. If you do so you should be able to manage your affairs without consulting me ... O Ayyub, I am ordering you

neither to receive anything from the people of Baghdad and Mada'in, nor to give anyone amongst them permission to contact me.

If anyone brings you revenue from outside your area, order him to send it to the agent of his own area. O Abu 'Ali, I am ordering you to follow what I have ordered Ayyub."[23](#)

This system saved the organization from otherwise inevitable damage after the harsh attack of al-Mutawakkil upon its underground political cells in 235/850. In the same way it was saved from the attack of al-Musta'in in 248/862.

It should be noted that during the time of the tenth and eleventh Imams, the leadership of the organization in the four areas, was monopolized by a few individuals. Their tasks later fell to their descendants and remained under their control during the shorter occultation of the Twelfth Imam. For example, 'Ali b. Mazyar was the agent of al-Jawad and al-Hadi in al-Ahwaz[24](#), while his sons were the agents of the Twelfth Imam in the same region[25](#).

Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Hamadani was the agent of al-Hadi in Hamadan[26](#), while his offspring inherited this post from father to son until the time of the Twelfth Imam[27](#).

Another agent was Isma'il b. Ishaq b. Nawbakht[28](#), whose family later directed the members of the organization in Baghdad, while one of his relatives, al-Husayn b. Ruh, became the third *Saf'ir* or "representative" of the Twelfth Imam.

Among the agents, the most important was 'Uthmari b. Said al-'Umari, who, as we shall see, was brought up under the auspices of the tenth Imam, al-Hadi. He made him first his own agent and then the agent of his son, Imam al-'Askari. After the death of the latter 'Uthman controlled the whole leadership of the organization as the first representative of the Twelfth Imam, and his son Muhammad later succeeded him to the post, as the second *Saf'ir*.

The fact that the Imam's activities were underground made it easy for certain people to claim falsely to be the representatives of al-Hadi and al-'Askari, and thus to collect money from the Imamites. It seems that this practice was carried out by the extremists (*al-Ghulat*) and increased throughout the time of the Twelfth Imam at the expense of his rightful agents[29](#).

2. The Main Functions of the Wikala

For the Twelver Imamites the series of Imams ends with the Twelfth Imam, who, from the death of his father in 260/874 up to the year 329/940-1, is believed to have lived in occultation. According to al-Nu'mani this period was called the "short occultation," *al-Ghayba al-Qasira*[30](#), and according to later scholars the minor occultation, *al-Ghayba al-Sughra*.

It was of decisive importance for the organization and the internal evolution of the congregation. During it the Twelfth Imam is considered to have pursued his activities from behind the scenes and to have led

his followers by means of four specially chosen representatives. These were called *sufara* (sing. *Saf'ir*) or "ambassadors."

The first was 'Uthman b. Said al-Umari, the second his son Muhammad, the third al-Husayn b. Ruh al-Nawbakhti and the fourth 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Sammari.

A critical study of the history of this period (260–329/874–941) reveals that the main function of the *Saf'irs* was to implement certain tasks previously undertaken by the Imams so as to save him from the political pressure of the 'Abbasids³¹.

His predecessors had suffered this pressure since the time of al-Ma'mun, especially since it was widely accepted among the Imamites of that period that the Twelfth Imam would be *al-Qa'im bi-l-Amr li-l-Zalat al-Duwal*, that is, "he who is to be in charge of eliminating the governments (of the oppressors by militant means).³²"

One of the ambassadors' tasks was to draw complete darkness over the name of the Imam and his whereabouts, not only as regards his foes, but even as regards his followers. Simultaneously the *Saf'ir* had to prove the existence of the Imam to his reliable adherents. This statement can be illustrated by a report of al-Kulayni. 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far al-Himyari once asked the first *Saf'ir* whether or not he had seen the successor of the eleventh Imam.

Al-'Umari, the *Saf'ir*, confirmed that he had seen him. But he added that people were forbidden to ask about his name, because if the government discovered his name they would certainly try to arrest him³³. In this way the first *Saf'ir* led the court of the caliph, al-Mu'tamid, to think that the eleventh Imam had died without a successor³⁴.

According to al-Kulayni's report, the conclusion reached by the 'Abbasids seems to have released the Imamites from the humiliation which they had suffered throughout the time of the previous Imams. The agents of the Twelfth Imam began to carry out their activities without being afraid of the authorities, since they were sure of the non-existence of the Twelfth Imam, and thus did not bother to investigate the Imamite's activities³⁵.

The activities of the *Saf'irs* also aimed at protecting the congregation from any more schisms by proving the authenticity of the Imamate of al-'Askari's son. Towards this aim they employed those sayings of the Prophet and the Imams which indicate that the series of Imams will end with the Twelfth, who would then go into occultation³⁶.

The four *Saf'irs* carried out another task in the name of the Imam. They received and collected the taxes that the Imamites had previously paid to their Imams. According to the Imamite sources all the *Saf'irs* performed miracles before receiving the money so that their adherents would believe in their legitimacy. According to the Imamite belief, whoever proclaimed himself a *Saf'ir* and did not work miracles had lied about the Imam and was driven out of the organization³⁷.

The *Tawqi'at* (written and signed answers or pronouncements) attributed to the Twelfth Imam indicate that he neither gave any statement to elucidate his attitude towards the political and economic situation of his time, nor ordered his followers to implicate themselves in an open political struggle with their rivals, the 'Abbasids.

In fact, it is reasonable to agree with Muhammad al-Sadr that by acting in this manner the Imam enabled his partisans to pursue their activities without attracting the attention of the 'Abbasids by statements criticising their rule³⁸.

Moreover it seems most likely that in following this policy the Imam wanted his agents and propagandists to concentrate their efforts upon strengthening the size and quality of their party, until it developed its political means and ideology to a degree which might enable it to put its goal into action.

But the involvement of the agents in an immediate political struggle would have taken place at the expense of an increase in the size and the development of the ideological and political basis of the organization.

3. The Early Career of Uthman b. Sa'id

Most of the Imamite information concerning the activities of the four *Saf'irs* is attributed to al-Tusi in his work *al-Ghayba*. The latter depended mainly on two early missing works, that is, *Kitab fi Akhbar Abi Amr wa Abi Ja'far al-'Umariyyayn* by Ibn Barina al-Katib, the son of the granddaughter of the second *Saf'ir*, and *Kitab Akhbar al-Wakil al-'Arba'a* by Ahmad b. Nuh³⁹.

Unfortunately, the work of al-Tusi and other works give very few details concerning the background to the career of the first *Saf'ir*. We know that the latter was Abu 'Amr 'Uthman b. Said al-Umari from the tribe of Asad.

Javad 'Ali, whose opinion was followed by Rajkowski, thought that the grandfather of 'Uthman was 'Amr b. Hurayth al-Sayrafi al-Kufi, a well-known Shi'ite from Kufa who belonged to Banu Asad. According to Javad 'Ali, since both belonged to the same tribe, both are known by the epithet al-Asadi⁴⁰.

But this cannot be accepted because there is no explicit evidence leading one to link the lineage of the two individuals. Nothing is known about the *Saf'ir* nor of his position in the congregation. Moreover, the year of his birth and the details of his youth have not been handed down.

It is said that at the age of eleven 'Uthman b. Said was contracted to become a servant in the house of the ninth Imam, al-Jaw-ad, and that he never left his service. Later he became his gate-keeper and chamberlain. As the Imam's "right hand", he enjoyed his entire confidence and was entrusted with the execution of all his commissions⁴¹.

'Uthman b. Said occupied this same position of trust throughout the lifetime of al-Hadi, the tenth

Imam⁴², who was watched carefully and suspiciously by the government of the day, so that he even avoided speaking with the individual members of the community.

For this reason, al-Hadi presented 'Uthman to those who found it difficult to consult him directly. He told them that 'Uthman was his trusted associate and a man of honour, and that whatever he did was done in the Imam's name⁴³.

Furthermore, al-Kashshi's account indicates that during the last ten years of the time of al-Hadi, the leadership of the underground organization (*al-Wikala*) was in 'Uthman's hands. He organized its internal affairs and systematized the relations between the centre of the organization and its branches in the remote provinces.

When the agent, 'Ali b. 'Amr, came to Samarra from Qazwin with money and contacted Faris b. Hatim, without knowing that the latter had been cursed by the Imam in 250/864, 'Uthman quickly moved his lieutenants to save the money and prevented 'Ali b. 'Amr from having contact with Faris b. Hatim⁴⁴.

'Uthman continued to hold this position of trust under the eleventh Imam al-'Askari, who appointed him using the same words as had his father. It is reported that al-'Askari had only informed a few of his followers that 'Uthman b. Said was his agent. However, at one point a group of Yemenite Shi'ites brought money to al-'Askari, and he revealed to them that 'Uthman was his agent and that his son, Muhammad, would be the agent of the Twelfth Imam, *al-Mahdi*⁴⁵.

According to another narration al-'Askari presented his successor to forty reliable Shi'ites, such as al-Hasan b. Ayyub, 'Ali b. Bilal, Ahmad b. Hilal, and 'Uthman b. Said. He informed them that they would not see him again and commanded them to obey 'Uthman during the concealment of the Twelfth Imam, because he would be his representative⁴⁶.

Moreover, during the last illness of the eleventh Imam, 'Uthman looked after him and cared for him. According to al-Tusi, he performed the last rites for the dead man, washed the corpse, wrapped him in his shroud and buried him. For the Imamites these are the unmistakeable signs that 'Uthman was the rightful representative *Saf'ir* of the hidden Imam. They contended that 'Uthman did all this on the orders of al-'Askari⁴⁷.

4. The Career of the First Saf'ir

The first *Saf'ir* managed to satisfy the prominent Imamites who were already members of the organization that the Twelfth Imam was in a state of occultation and thus safe from his enemies, while also convincing them that he was the rightful representative of the Imam.

It appears that his occupation of the leadership of the organization during the time of the tenth and the eleventh Imams encouraged the agents to accept his claim and follow his instructions, without asking him to show a miracle or proof⁴⁸.

However, the ordinary Imamites, who had nothing to do with the organization, were confused by the occultation of the Imam and, as has been noted⁴⁹, held different views concerning the Twelfth Imam's successor. Many Imamites refused to pay the *khums* to 'Uthman b. Said unless he showed, by means of a miracle, that he had been rightfully appointed by the Twelfth Imam. This is illustrated by a narrative of al-Kulayni attributed to Sa'd al-Ash'ari al-Qummi:

"Al-Hasan b. al-Nadr, Abu al-Saddam and a number of others spoke together after the death of Abu Muhammad (the eleventh Imam) about the agents and decided to search for the new Imam. Al-Hasan b. Nadr came to Abu al-Saddam and said to him, 'I desire to make the pilgrimage.' Abu al-Saddam said to him, 'Delay it this year.'

Al-Hasan b. al-Nadr said to him, 'I am frightened by my dreams, so I must go.' He made Ahmad b. Ya'la b. Hammad his executor. The latter had devoted some money to the Imam. Hearing of al-Hasan's decision, he gave the money to al-Hasan and commanded him not to hand anything over without proof.

"Al-Hasan said, 'When I arrived at Baghdad I rented a house. Thereafter an agent brought me clothes and money and entrusted them to me. I said to him, "What is this?" He said to me, "It is what you see." Then another one brought similar goods, and a third one until they filled the house. Afterwards Ahmad b. Ishaq (the assistant of the Saf'ir) brought me all the goods he had. Thus I became confused. But later I received a message from al-Rajul (the Imam), peace be upon him, ordering me to take the goods to al-'Askar (Samarra).

. . When I arrived there I received a message ordering me to bring the goods (to him). So I loaded them in the baskets of the carriers. When I reached the corridor of his house, I found a black slave standing there. He asked me, "Are you al-Hasan b. al-Nadr?" I said, "Yes." He replied, "Enter." So I entered the house, and then I entered an apartment, where I emptied the baskets of the carriers. . .

There was a curtain leading to another apartment. Someone called me from behind it, "O al-Hasan b. al-Nadr, praise Allah for His grace is upon you, and do not doubt, for Satan would be pleased if you waver." Thereafter he sent out two garments for me and said, "Take them, because you will need them." So I took them and went out.' "

Sa'd al-Ash'ari reports that al-Hasan b. al-Nadr departed and died in the month of Ramadan, and the two garments were used as his shroud⁵⁰.

This event was a clear proof to al-Hasan, because both his name and his doubts concerning the validity of the agents' activities had been revealed to him. Moreover, according to Sa'd al-Ash'ari, the two garments which al-Hasan had received were a prediction of his death, which occurred a month later.

If one studies carefully the circumstances surrounding al-Hasan b. al-Nadr from the time of his decision to investigate the activities of the agents until his death, one can surmise that the agents arranged them so as to remove his doubts.

They would have done so because al-Hasan b. al-Nadr was prominent amongst the Imamites of Qumm⁵¹, and his doubts might have affected the Imamites of his area. So perhaps the agents of Qumm informed the *Saf'ir* in Baghdad about his arrival there. This can be understood from the act of Ahmad b. Ishaq and the other agents who brought the clothes to al-Hasan's house and later sent him a letter ordering him to send the goods to Samarra.

There, it is reported, he met the Imam, who confirmed for him the validity of the agent's activities. One can discover from this example and many others not quoted here⁵² the means used by the *Saf'ir* to remove the doubts and confusion of the Imamites brought about by the concealment of their Imam, and to make them obey his instructions.

As has already been indicated the *Saf'ir* forbade his partisans to ask about the name of the Imam. Perhaps, their silence along with al-'Askari's last will in which he bequeathed his endowments to his mother and placed her in charge of his affair without referring to his successor⁵³, encouraged the authorities to believe that the Imamites no longer had an Imam and, therefore, that any Imamite activities were useless. In doing so the *Saf'ir* gained a certain freedom to have communication with the Twelfth Imam and his followers. This is illustrated by a statement attributed to the *Saf'ir*:

*"The caliph thinks that Abu Muhammad (al-'Askari), peace be upon him, died childless. Thus his estate was divided and given to someone, who had no right in the estate but he (the Twelfth Imam) kept quiet. These are his agents carrying out their activities without being afraid that someone would stop them for investigation. If the (Imam's) name is identified, the (authorities) would start searching for (his whereabouts). So, by Allah, do not ask about his name."*⁵⁴

The belief that al-'Askari had no successor was circulated among some sunni scholars, such as Abu al-Qasim al-Balkhi (died around 300/912). In his account of the Imamite doctrine, he states, "In our time al-Hasan b. 'Ali died and had no son. Therefore they (the Imamites) became confused⁵⁵.

Gradually this belief was so disseminated among the non-Imamite circles that leading sunni scholars such as Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1063) and al-Shahristani (d. 548/1153) were encouraged to view it as a matter of fact⁵⁶. Later al-Dhahabi believed that al-'Askari left a son but he disappeared when he was nine years old or less in 265/878, when he entered a cellar (*sardab*) in Samarra and was not seen again⁵⁷.

In other words the Twelfth Imam died during the lifetime of the first *Saf'ir*. But al-Dhahabi is a later historian, since he died in 748/1347. Moreover he does not give the source of his narration, nor does he state explicitly how al-'Askari's son died even though he presents his information concerning the concealment of the Twelfth Imam in the list of people who died in 265/878 to give the impression that he had passed away in that year.

The earliest report concerning the occultation of al-'Askari's son in the cellar is given by al-Kanji, who died in 08/1260, but he also does not mention the source of his information⁵⁸.

It is therefore most likely that al-Dhahabi based his report upon a belief common among the Imamite masses, that the Twelfth Imam had hidden himself in the cellar of his house. This belief spread after the fifth/eleventh century and later became popular among certain scholars, such as Ibn Khaldun⁵⁹.

Moreover, several reports in the early Imamite sources refute al-Dhahabi's narration and prove that the Twelfth Imam was alive after 265/878. Al-Tusi mentions that many of the Imamites received written answers to their letters from the Imam in the same handwriting as in the letters they used to receive during the lifetime of the first *Saf'ir*⁶⁰, and al-Saduq lists thirteen agents and forty-six ordinary Imamites from numerous cities who claimed to have seen the Twelfth Imam both during and after the time of the first *Saf'ir*⁶¹.

From this it is clear that al-Dhahabi's report is based on popular belief rather than upon sound historical facts. So it would be foolish to give credence to his claims concerning the death and occultation of the Twelfth Imam.

5. The Opposition to the First *Saf'ir*

As has been noted the occultation of the Imam resulted in the gradual expansion of the role of the *Saf'ir*. However it also made it easier for a pretender to the deputyship (*al-sifara* or *al-niyaba*) to practice his activities among the Imamites at the expense of the Imam's rightful representative. As we have seen, this was practiced mainly throughout the period of the short occultation by the extremists (*al-Ghulat*).

That they were extremists is indicated by a number of factors. Firstly, the claimant to the *sifara* believed in the incarnation of God (hulul)⁶².

Most of the claimants to the *sifara* from the time of al-Hasan al-Shari'i up until al-Shalmaghani claimed first that they were the agents of the Imam. Then when the Imam excommunicated them, they called people on their own account. Extremists had claimed to be the Imam's representative even before the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, but with a slight difference.

The claimant would first announce that he was the Gate (*Bab*) of the Imam, and then claim that he was a prophet. Al-Kashshi mentions many extremists who did so, such as Muhammad b. Furat, al-Qasim al-Yaqtini and Ali b. Haska⁶³.

The third factor indicating that the claimants were extremists is that certain links existed between the extremists active during the time of the tenth and eleventh Imams and the claimants who lived during the time of the short occultation.

According to al-Kashshi, Ali b. Haska was the teacher of Muhammad b. Musa al-Shari'i, al-Qasim al-Yaqtini and al-Hasan b. Muhammad b. Baba⁶⁴. The last of these was a close follower of Muhammad b. Nusayr, who led the extremists trend during the time of the eleventh Imam, and then claimed that he was the agent of the Twelfth Imam⁶⁵. Moreover, Ibn Nusayr was supported by some of Banu Furat, the

descendants of the extremist Muhammad b. Furat⁶⁶.

According to al-Tusi, Abu Muhammad al-Hasan al-Shari'i⁶⁷ was the first to claim falsely to be the Imam's representative during the short occultation, but the Imamites cursed him and refused to accept him. Then the Twelfth Imam issued a *Tawqi*; in which he excommunicated al-Shari'i and announced the falseness of his claim⁶⁸.

Although al-Shari'i did not achieve immediate success, his following grew in strength and eventually he formed a strong threat to the leadership of the second *Saf'ir*.

6. The Imam's Wikala During the Time of the First Saf'ir

The main problem facing any historian dealing with the period of the short occultation is that most of the activities of the Twelfth Imam and his representatives were carried out underground. Perhaps for this reason, the Imamite scholars such as al-Kulayni, 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far al-Himyari, Sa'd al-Ash 'ari and al-Hasan b. Musa al-Nawbakhti rarely mention the names of the Imam's agents, or refer to their activities or links with each other: however, they do refer to those of their activities which did not attract the attention of the authorities.

Therefore, the historical information concerning the underground activities of the agents is to be found scattered throughout the theological and heresiographical works much more than in the histories. Because of the nature of these works the historical information has taken on a heresiographical form. In addition, both questions asked by the Shi'ites and answers of the Twelfth Imam and his *Saf'irs* were collected during his time, but unfortunately, most of them have been lost.

Only a few are extant, especially in works dealing with the concealment (*Ghayba*). For example the second *Saf'ir* Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. 'Uthman, collected the pronouncements of his father, but his collection is not extant. However, many anecdotes which assist us in discovering the links among the Imam's agents and the nature of their activities have been recorded.

A) Iraq: The Centre of the Wikala

After the death of the eleventh Imam, the first *Saf'ir* had not the slightest reason to remain in Samarra, which was then the capital and the headquarters of the troops of the 'Abbasid dynasty, which had opposed the Imams from the very beginning.

Perhaps for this reason, 'Uthman b. Said wanted to carry out the activities of the organization beyond the surveillance of the authorities in the capital. Therefore he moved to Baghdad, where he made the area of alKarkh, which was inhabited by Shi'ites, the centre for the leadership of the organization⁶⁹.

A part of 'Uthman's prudent fear (*al-Taqiyya*) was to evade the investigation of the regime by not involving himself in any open political or religious arguments. He also disguised himself as a

butter-seller (*samman*) and, used to bring money to the Imam in a butter-sack. Consequently he acquired the nickname al-Zayyat or al-Samman⁷⁰.

Al-Kashshi reports that his name was Hafs b. 'Amr al-'Umari⁷¹, which may have been a pseudonym he used when he held underground meetings with other agents.

It has been noted that the Twelfth Imam was sent by his father to Medina in 259/873. However, the first *Saf'ir* made Baghdad the centre of the organization. He followed the traditional geographical divisions of the Islamic provinces in organizing the underground political units (cells) of the organization. Nevertheless he took into consideration the size of each factional unit, the distance of each area from the capital, and its situation on the main roads.

According to al-Kashshi, 'Uthman b. Said was the head of the *Wikala* from the time of the eleventh Imam, in the sense that all the revenue sent by the adherents to the Imam through his agents was given in the end to 'Uthman, who in turn handed it over to the Imam⁷².

Many agents were situated below the *Saf'ir* in the ranks of the organization in Baghdad and in the other cities of Iraq, such as Hajiz b. Yazid al-Washsha', Ahmad b. Ishaq al-Ash'ari and Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Ja'far al-Qattan, the last two of whom were the chief assistants of the first *Saf'ir*.

Ahmad b. Ishaq was at first al-'Askari's agent for his endowments awqaa in Qumm⁷³. However, after the death of al-'Askari the sources begin to refer to his activities in Baghdad as assistant to 'Uthman b. Said in the financial affairs of the organization. Al-Kulayni reports that in 260/874 some people from the east doubted the validity of the agents after al-'Askari's death and for this reason they came to Baghdad. Along with other agents Ahmad b. Ishaq managed to remove their doubts⁷⁴.

The first *Saf'ir* may have summoned him from Qumm because he needed his service in Iraq after al-'Askari's death. According to Ibn Rustam al-Tabari, Ahmad b. Ishaq continued his career in the organization in Iraq until his death during the time of the second *Saf'ir*⁷⁵.

Muhammad al-Qattan was the second agent of the *Saf'ir* in Baghdad. In order to hide his activities he disguised himself as a cotton dealer. The agents used to bring money and letters to him hidden in cotton which he then took to the *Saf'ir*⁷⁶.

Ibn Rustam reports that in 261-3/875-6 the people of Dinawar collected 16,000 dinars, which were entrusted to a certain Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Dinawari. At Qarmisin⁷⁷ he collected 1,000 dinars more and some garments. After an intensive search in Baghdad and Sdmarra, he received in Samarra a letter describing the money and other items and ordering him to take them to 'Uthman b. Sa'id and to follow his instructions.

The latter ordered al-Dinawari to hand over the items to al-Qattan⁷⁸. It is reported that al-Qattan had dealings with an agent in Tus called al-Hasan b. al-Fadl b. Zayd al-Yamani. According to al-Mufid,

al-Yamani used to deal with al-Qattan as if he were the *Saf'ir*⁷⁹.

The third agent of the *Saf'ir* in Baghdad was Hajiz. His relations with a large number of agents indicate that he held a high position in the organization. He was perhaps the connecting link between the agents in the eastern provinces and the *Saf'ir* in Baghdad, especially since al-Saduq and al-Kulayni mention certain persons from the cities of Balkh and Marv who contacted the Imam and his *Saf'ir* through Hajiz⁸⁰.

While the first *Saf'ir* seems to have led the affairs of the organization in Baghdad with the help of his three assistants, he may also have directly supervised the activities of his agents in the other main cities, such as al-Mada'in, Kufa, Wasit, Basra and al-Ahwaz.

In the last of these the leadership of the *Wikala* had been in the hands of Banu Mazyar or Mahzayar from the time of the ninth Imam. Al-Kashshi reports that the agent of the Imam in al-Ahwaz, Ibrahim b. Mazyar, had collected a large amount of money.

On his deathbed he revealed to his son Muhammad a special secret code and ordered him to hand the money over to the person who would disclose to him his knowledge of this code.

Al-Kashshi adds that when Muhammad arrived at Baghdad, al-'Umari the *Saf'ir* came to him and divulged to him the exact code, so he handed the money over to him⁸¹. It is clear from this report that the first *Saf'ir* had already agreed on the code with Ibrahim al-Mazyar so as to save the organization from infiltration and misuse by false agents.

According to al-Kulayni and al-Mufid, a few days later Muhammad received a letter of promotion indicating that he was installed in the post of his father in al-Ahwaz⁸².

This underground system of communication between the *Saf'ir* in Baghdad and the agent in al-Ahwaz was similar to other such systems which existed at this stage between the *Saf'ir* and his other agents in Iraq, such as Banu al-Rakuli in Kufa⁸³.

B) The Second Area: Egypt, the Hijaz and Yemen

The main centre for the organization in this area seems to have been Medina. It is reported that al-'Askari had many agents there amongst the 'Alids (*al-Talibiyyin*). However, after al-'Askari's death, some of them denied the existence of his son, the Twelfth Imam.

According to al-Kulayni, those who held that al-'Askari had left a son received letters confirming them in their posts, whereas the deniers did not receive such letters which showed that they were dismissed from their posts in the *Wikala*⁸⁴.

Another report indicates that the principal agent in Medina in 264/877-8 was Yahya b. Muhammad al-'Arid⁸⁵. Unfortunately, the sources neither explain how the *Saf'ir* in Baghdad used to contact his agents

in Hijaz, nor do they refer to the connecting links among the agents of Egypt, Hijaz and Yemen. However, it is most likely that the agents used the occasion of the pilgrimage to communicate with each other⁸⁶.

But it seems that the *Saf'ir* did not keep in direct contact with his agent in Medina and preferred to employ slaves who were mostly ignorant and irreligious as the connecting link. He did this to keep the attention of the authorities away from such activities.

The agents in Egypt followed the instructions of the agents in Hijaz, especially as regards their contact with the centre in Iraq. Al-Kulayni reports a narration attributed to al-Hasan b. 'Isa al-Aridi, who was probably the agent in Mecca⁸⁷.

He says that after the death of al-Askari, an Egyptian came to Mecca with money for the Imam, but was confused because some people held that al-'Askari had died without a son and that the Imam was his brother Ja'far, whereas other people informed him that al-'Askari had, in fact, left a successor.

Afterwards he sent a certain person called Abu Talib to Samarra with a letter, probably a recommendation from the agent in Mecca. In Samarra Abu Talib first contacted Ja'far, asking him for proof so that he could accept his Imamate, but Ja'far could not produce any.

Therefore he went to the Gate (*Bab*, deputy), who gave him a strong proof that he was the rightful representative of the new Imam (the Twelfth), by revealing to him that his master, the Egyptian, had entrusted him with money to deal with according to his wish. For this reason Abu Talib handed over the money to the *Bab* and received a letter in reply to his letter⁸⁸.

Perhaps the agent in Mecca had sent forward complete information concerning the case of his Egyptian colleague.

Yemen was a traditional region for Shi'ite tendencies. Al-Hadi had had agents there since 248/862,⁸⁹ and there were agents who had direct contact with 'Uthman b. Said during the time of al-Askari⁹⁰.

According to al-Kulayni, the chief agent in Yemen during the time of the Twelfth Imam was Ja'far b. Ibrahim, who was related to a family working in the Imamite organization in Hamadan, Kufa and Yemen⁹¹. A report mentioned by al-Najashi indicates that the connecting link between the agents in Yemen and the first *Saf'ir* was 'Ali b. al-Husayn al-Yamani⁹².

C) The Third Area: Azerbaijan and Arran

The third area was Azerbaijan. According to Muhammad al-Safwani⁹³, the agent there was al-Qasim b. al-'Ala, who had held the post from the time of al-Hadi and who continued his activities from the province of Arran⁹⁴ during the time of the Twelfth Imam. The Twelfth Imam remained in touch with al-Qasim until the latter died during the time of the third *Saf'ir*, when his post was given to his son al

Hasan at the Twelfth Imam's order.

Al-Safwani does not mention the name of the connecting link between the agent of this area and the centre of the organization. However, he states explicitly that al-Qasim b. al-'Ala was in direct contact with the *Saf'ir* in Iraq through a messenger, who used to deal with him without revealing his name⁹⁵.

D) The Fourth Area: Qumm and Dinawar

It is well-known that Qumm was a traditional area for the Shi'ites, the bulk of whom were Arab⁹⁶, and that there were many endowments (*awqaf*) for the Imams in Qumm. Therefore, it probably received more attention from the first *Saf'ir*, who used to keep in direct contact not only with the agent of Qumm but also with the other agents in the province of Jabal.

The prominent agent in Qumm was 'Abd Allah b. Ja'far al-Himyari⁹⁷, who remained in this post during the time of the second *Saf'ir*⁹⁸. Moreover, there were many sub agents in numerous cities with a considerable Imamite population, such as Dinawar, whose agent in 261-3/875-6 was Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Dinawari. The agent in Qurmisin was Ahmad al-Madra'i⁹⁹.

E) The Fifth Area: Rayy and Khurasan

Al-Kashshi's account of the situation of the organization during the time of the tenth and the eleventh Imams indicates that the latter had several agents in various cities in Khurasan and the eastern provinces, extending as far as the city of Kabul. Those agents, along with other sub-agents, used to carry out their missions according to the direct instruction of the Imam. For example, al-'Askari sent Ayyub b. al-Nab to Nisapur as his agent¹⁰⁰.

However, the penetration of the movement into remote regions of the east, the rise of the Zaydite state in Tabaristan from 250/864, and the continual military activities of the Khawarij in Sijistan, which caused a great deal of trouble for Imamites¹⁰¹, all helped make it difficult for al-'Askari to supervise directly the activities in each area.

Therefore al-'Askari issued a letter ordering the activities of the agents in Bayhaq and Nisapur to be linked with those of the agents in Rayy so that the two former cities could only receive his instructions from the agent in Rayy, who was to take his orders directly from 'Uthman b. Said in Samarra.

According to this letter al-'Askari appointed Ishaq b. Muhammad as his agent in Nisapur, commanding him to pay the dues to Ibrahim b. 'Abda, his agent in Bayhaq and its districts. The latter in turn was commanded to hand the dues to the agent of Rayy, Muhammad b. Ja'far al-Razi or to the person appointed by al-Razi.

At the end of his letter the Imam pointed out that all the *khums* and other taxes which were sent by his followers should be given to 'Uthman b. Said, who would then hand them to him¹⁰². Such a statement

reveals that ‘Uthman b. Said was at the top of the organization before the death of al-‘Askari in 260/874.

After the death of al-‘Askari the first *Saf’ir* followed the system of communication which had been practiced before. Several anecdotes reveal that he directed the activities of this area through the agent in Rayy, al-Rgazi, who in turn directly supervised the activities of the agents in Bayhaq, Nisapur¹⁰³, and perhaps Hamadan.

There were many sub-agents of different ranks below the main agent in each city. Al-Najashi reports a narration which elucidates this system. He mentions that al-Qasim b. Muhammad al-Hamadani, Bistam b. ‘Ali and ‘Aziz b. Zuhayr were sub-agents in one place in Hamadan and carried out their task under the instructions and commands of al-Hasan b. Harun b. ‘Umran al-Hamadani¹⁰⁴. Al-Najashi does not explain how the latter used to contact the *Saf’ir*.

Al-Kulayni, however, reports that Muhammad b. Harun b. ‘Umran al-Hamadani, the brother of the agent of Hamadan, made his shops an endowment (*waqf*) to the Twelfth Imam and wanted to hand them over to his agent, whose identity was unknown to him.

Thereafter Muhammad b. Ja’far al-Razi, the agent of Rayy, received an order to take these shops as *waqf* ¹⁰⁵ in his capacity as *wakil* for the whole of Iran. This narration reveals that there was a strong link between the agent of Rayy and the agent of Hamadan and that the latter was below al-Razi in the ranks of the organization¹⁰⁶.

Since the agents in this area held different ranks within the organization, it is most likely that this system existed in the other areas of the organization as well.

7. The Death of the First Saf’ir

Despite the important role of the first *Saf’ir*, ‘Uthman b. Said, no one gives the date of his death. Modern historians have tried to supply plausible dates. Hashim al-Hasani thinks that the deputyship (*al-sifara*) of ‘Uthman b. Said continued until the year 265/879,¹⁰⁷ but he does not give any source for this information. In contrast Javad Ali states as follows:

*"Twenty years after the withdrawal of the Twelfth Imam, in the year 280/893, the first Saf’ir died, according to a tawqi, said to have been addressed by the hidden Imam to the son of the first Saf’ir and the Shi’ite congregation, in which after expressing sentiments of condolence on the death of such a pious man, the Imam appointed his son Abu Ja’far (Muhammad) as his successor."*¹⁰⁸

However, Javad Ali relied on al-Tusi, who only indicates that the narrator, Muhammad b. Humam, heard the narration from Muhammad al-Razi in 280/893; he does not cite any date for the death of the first *Saf’ir*¹⁰⁹.

Furthermore, it seems that the first *Saf’ir* did not remain in office for a long period, because al-Tusi

reports that when Muhammad b. 'Uthman (Abu Ja'far) succeeded his father, a certain Ahmad b. Hilal al-Abarta'i, whose death occurred in 267/880–1,^{[110](#)} denied that Abu Ja'far was the *Saf'ir* of the Twelfth Imam after his father.^{[111](#)} Hence the death of the first *Saf'ir* must have occurred after 260/874, the date of the death of the eleventh Imam, and before 267/880.

According to Ibn Barina, 'Uthman b. Sa'id was buried on the western side of Baghdad in the Darb Mosque. This mosque takes its name from its position at Darb Jibla, an avenue in the Maydan street^{[112](#)}. Al-Tusi confirms Ibn Barina's report when he states that he saw the grave in a place which he used to visit every month between the years 404/1013 and 433/1040.^{[113](#)}

¹. Javad 'Ali, op. cit., in Der Islam, XXV (1939), 212.

². al-Ghayba, 224–5. Al-Tusi thinks that Ibn al-Hajjaj died during the time of al-Ri'ā'a, but al-Mas'udi reports that he was still alive after al-Ri'ā'a's death in 203/818; Ithbat, 213.

³. al-Kafi, II, 557; Ikhtiyar, 381; al-Saduq, Man la Yahduruh al-Faqih (al-Mashyakha), IV, 67. The date of his death is not mentioned. However, al-Kashshi reports that Dawud b. 'Ali, who killed Mu'alla, died a few days after Mu'alla, and according to al-Dhahabi, Dawud died in 133/750 (Mizan, II, 14). So the persecution of Mu'alla must have occurred in the same year.

⁴. Ikhtiyar, 459–60.

⁵. al-Najashi, 21, 231, 250, 348.

⁶. Ithbat, 213.

⁷. al-Najashi, 250.

⁸. al-Najashi, 209.

⁹. Ikhtiyar, 258; N. Firaq, 67–8, 'Uyun, 194–5.

¹⁰. 'Uyun, I, 89–90, II, 143.

¹¹. For a full account of these traditions see Chapter I pp 17–30; however the Waqifa report a tradition attributed to al-Sadiq which states that al-Qa'im would be the seventh Imam; Ikhtiyar, 475; al-Kafi, I, 320–1

¹². Ikhtiyar, 463–7, 475–8; T. al-Ghayba, 227–8.

¹³. 'Ilal, I, 235; T. al-Ghayba, 46–7; Ikhtiyar, 459–60, 466–7.

¹⁴. Ikhtiyar, 597–9.

¹⁵. Ikhtiyar, 483, 506, 591–2.

¹⁶. al-Najashi, 148.

¹⁷. T. al-Ghayba, 224–5; al-Tusi states that 'Abd Allah b. Jandab was the agent of the seventh and the eighth Imams but it seems that his career in the organization was earlier than that. According to Ibn Shu'ba, he was the agent of the sixth Imam, al-Sadiq; Ibn Shu'ba, Tuhaf al-'Uqul, 223.

¹⁸. Ithbat, 213–5.

¹⁹. al-Najashi, 80, 98, 254; al-Tusi, al-Istibsar, II, 58–61; al-Kafi V, 111.

²⁰. al-Ya'qubi, III, 217.

²¹. Ibn Shahr Ashub, Manaqib, IV, 389.

²². al-Kafi, I, 324.

²³. Ikhtiyar, 513–4; according to another letter the agent of al-Hadi in Baghdad and its environs was 'Ali b. al-Husayn b. 'Abd Rabba. After his death in Mecca in 229/843, Abu 'Ali b. Rashid assumed his post; Ikhtiyar, 510.

²⁴. al-Najashi, 191.

²⁵. Kama'l, 442; al-Kafi I, 518.

²⁶. Ikhtiyar, 608, 611–2, 557.

²⁷. Ibn Dawud, al-Rijal, 248; al-Kafi, I, 519; Ikhtiyar, 608; al-Najashi, 265–6.

²⁸. Ithbat, 215; al-Barqi categorized him as one of the close followers of al-Hadi; al-Rijal, 60

²⁹. The representatives of this trend throughout the time of the tenth and the eleventh Imams were mainly such extremists as Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Sayyari, Ja'far b. Waqid, Abu al-Samhari, 'Amr b. Yahya al-Dihqan, Faris b. Hatim

al-Qazwini and Muhammad b. Nusayr al-Numayri; Ikhtiyar, 525, 529, 573, 606.

[30.](#) N. al-Ghayba, 92

[31.](#) al-Sadr, op. cit., I, 341–6.

[32.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 56, 109.

[33.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 57.

[34.](#) al-Kafi, I, 505; Kama'l, 441–2.

[35.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 157; al-Kafi, I, 330.

[36.](#) For a full account of the traditions which were used by the Imamites during the short occultation, see al-Kafi, I, 525–35; N. al-Ghayba, 26–47; al-'Asfari, Asl Abu Said al-'A fari, f. 1–3.

[37.](#) Kama'l, 476–8; Javad 'Ali, op. cit., in Der Islam, XXV (1939), 197–227.

[38.](#) al-Sadr; op. cit., I, 377–9.

[39.](#) al-Najashi, 343; T. al-Fihrist, 48.

[40.](#) Javad 'Ali, op. cit. in Der Islam, XXV (1939), 199; Rajkowski, op. cit., 667; al Najashi, 222; T. al-Fihrist, 243; al-Tusi mentions that the grandfather of 'Uthman was 'Amr, however, he does not link him with 'Amr b. Hurayth; T. al-Ghayba, 231.

[41.](#) Javad 'Ali, op. cit., in Der Islam, XXV (1939), 199.

[42.](#) Dala'il, 217.

[43.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 229.

[44.](#) Ikhtiyar, 526.

[45.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 229–31.

[46.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 231–2; Kama'l, 435; for a full account of those men see al-Najashi, 41, 202, 323.

[47.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 231.

[48.](#) Kama'l, 90, 441–2; al-Kafi, I, 329–30; T. al-Ghayba, 157.

[49.](#) For a full account see Chapter III.

[50.](#) al-Kafi, I, 517–8, 522–3.

[51.](#) Al-Kashshi gives his statement as regards al-Hasan b. al-Nadr along with his account of Abu Hamid al-Maraghi. He does not name explicitly the city which al-Hasan belonged to; Ikhtiyar, 535. According to al-Mustawfi Maragha is a large town, and was formerly the capital of Azerbaijan; al-Qazwini, Nuzhat al Qulub, 88. However, there is evidence to support the claim that al-Hasan b. al Nadr was a native of Qumm. Al-Saduq reports that al-Hasan was from Qumm and listed him among the people who saw the twelfth Imam; Kama'l, 442.

[52.](#) Al-Kulayni reports in his account of the birth of the twelfth Imam sixteen narrations, elucidating the activities of the first Saf'ir with his followers. Most of these narrations indicate that he practiced miracles to persuade them that he was rightfully appointed by the Imam; al-Kafi: I, 514–24, narrations nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12–17, 20, 21, 23, 28.

[53.](#) al-Fusul al-'Ashra, 13.

[54.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 157–8, al-Kafi, I, 329–30.

[55.](#) Abd al-Jabbar, al-Mugni (Cairo, 1963), II, 176; quoted from al-Balkhi.

[56.](#) Milal, 128; Fasl IV, 181, however some later sunni scholars such as Abu Nu 'aym al-Asfahini, 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'ram al-Maliki, al-Kunji al-Shafi'i and Sibti b. al-Jawzi held that al-Hasan al-'Askari had, in fact, left a son. For full account of the later sunnite views concerning the existence of the twelfth Imam, see Sulayman al-Qanduri, al-Hanafi; Yanabi al-Mawadda (al Istana, n.d.), 451, 471, 491; Sadr al-Din al-Sadr, op. cit., 65–7.

[57.](#) al-Dhahabi, al-'Ibar, II, 31.

[58.](#) al-Kanji, op. cit., 336–7.

[59.](#) Ibn Khaldun writes that the twelfth Imam disappeared in a cellar in Hilla. However, Hilla was established in 495/1101 by Banu Mazyad whereas the occultation of the Imam, according to al-Dhahabi took place in 265/878. Thus it appears that Ibn Khaldun also relied in his report on the popular belief; al Muqaddima (Cairo, 1322), 157.

[60.](#) Al-Tusi states that the second Saf'ir saw the twelfth Imam in Mecca holding the drapes of the Ka'ba. According to another report a certain Yusuf b. Ahmad al-Ja'fari on his way to Syria in 309/921 saw the Imam (T. al-Ghayba, 162, 166). For a full account of the letters of the Imamites and their answers by the Imam, see T. al-Ghayba, 184–93; Muhammad

al-Sadr, op. cit., 1, 403,430.

[61.](#) Kama'l, 442–3.

[62.](#) Abu al-Fida, al-Mukhtasar, II, 80–I; al-Kamil, VIII, 219–20.

[63.](#) Ikhtiyar, 518, 520, 555.

[64.](#) Ikhtiyar, 521.

[65.](#) According to al-Tabrani (a Nusayri writer), the Nusayriyya movement was established by 'Ali b. Ahmad al-Tarba'i, who during the time of al-'Askari gained thirty-five partisans in the village of Tarba' and other followers in Ninawa near Hilla. Then he attracted Muhammad b. Nusayr to his side. The latter led the movement along with his student al-Husayn b. Harridan during the time of the short occultation. In 336/947 the movement became independent from the Imamites, and gave more emphasis to the role of the Gate (Bab) than the Imam himself; al-Tabrani, Sabil Rah at al-Arwah, in Der Islam, XXVII (1946), 129–31.

[66.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 259.

[67.](#) Al-Tusi mentions that al-Shari'i was an adherent of the tenth Imam and that he is not sure about his real name. Al-Kashshi mentions a certain Muhammad b. Musa al-Shari'i or al-Sharif amongst the Ghulat during the time of the tenth Imam. It is most likely that he is the same person discussed by al-Tusi; Ikhtiyar, 521

[68.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 258.

[69.](#) Javad 'Ali, op. cit., in Der Islam, XXV (1939), 203; In his account of al-Karkh district al-Baghdadi states that many places were inhabited by Rafidites (Shi'ites); al-Khatib, I, 81.

[70.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 229.

[71.](#) Ikhtiyar, 532.

[72.](#) Ikhtiyar, 580.

[73.](#) al-Qummi, Tarikhi Qumm, 211.

[74.](#) al-Kafi, I, 517–8.

[75.](#) Dala'il, 272, 275–7.

[76.](#) Bihar, LI, 316–7.

[77.](#) Qarmisin: A small town in the province of Jabal about thirty-one farsakhs from Hamadan. Ibn Khurdadhba, al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik (Leiden, 1889), 41, 198.

[78.](#) Bihar, LI, 300–3; Dala'il, 283–5.

[79.](#) al-Irshad, 399. For the relations of al-Qattan with the eastern provinces, see Ikhtiyar, 535.

[80.](#) Kama'l, 488, 499; al-Kafi, I, 521; Bihar, LI, 294, 295–6.

[81.](#) Ikhtiyar, 531.

[82.](#) al-Kafi, I, 518; al-Irshad, 397.

[83.](#) al-Fusul al-'Ashara, 17; According to al-Mufid Banu al-Rakuli were the agents of the Imam in Kufa; however, after the death of the first Saf'ir, the sources begin to refer to Banu Zuzara and Banu al-Zajawzi as the agents in Kufa. The two different names. الرکولي الزجوزجي seem to refer to one family. Perhaps the correct spelling of this name is الزجوزجي but the copyist of al-Mufid's work misread it as الرکولي. T. al-Ghayba, 198–200.

[84.](#) al-Kafi, I, 518–9.

[85.](#) Kama'l, 496–7; al-Saduq reports that al-'Aridi knew the place of the twelfth Imam in Medina and guided a person from Kashmir to the Imam; Kama'l, 497, 440.

[86.](#) al-Irshad, 401.

[87.](#) al-Kafi, I, 523.

[88.](#) al-Kafi, I, 523. Al-Mufid relates the same report but both of them did not give the name of the agent of the Imam in Samarra, al-Irshad, 401.

[89.](#) Ikhtiyar, 527; al-Kafi, I, 519.

[90.](#) T. al-Ghayba. 216.

[91.](#) al-Najashi, 264.

[92.](#) al-Kafi, I, 519–20.

[93.](#) According to al-Tusi, al-Safwani was the assistant of al-Qasim b. al-'Ala during the time of the third Saf'ir; another

report indicates that he met the second Saf'ir in Baghdad in 307/919; T. al-Ghayba, 203–5

[94.](#) Al-Safwani reports that Arran was a city in Azerbaijan, but it is well known among the geographers that Arran is a province and that its capital was Barda'. It is included in the great triangle of land lying to the west of the junction point of the rivers Ayrus (Kur) and Araxas (al-Ras); T. al-Ghayba, 204.

[95.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 204.

[96.](#) Ibn Hawqal, al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik, 264; al-Subki, op. cit., III, 230, 233.

[97.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 229–30.

[98.](#) al-Najashi 162–3.

[99.](#) Bihar, LI, 300, quoted from Kitab al-Nujum.

[100.](#) Ikhtiyar, 542–3, 527.

[101.](#) Al-Kashshi's report indicates that the relations between the Khawarij and the Imamites in Sijistan were tense. He states that al-Fadl b. Shadhan escaped from the Khawarij when they attacked Bayhaq, but he died during his escape; Ikhtiyar, 543. Al-Isfahani reports that the Khawarij killed an 'Alid called Muhammad b. Ja'far b. Muhammad; Maqatil, 453.

[102.](#) Ikhtiyar, 509–10, 575–8.

[103.](#) al-Kafi, I, 523–4; Ikhtiyar, 509–10, 575–80.

[104.](#) al-Najashi, 264–5.

[105.](#) al-Kafi, I, 524.

[106.](#) Although there is no clear statement concerning the links between al-Razi and Hamadan. there is ample evidence that al-Razi controlled the activities of all the agents in Iran, so it is more than probable that he directed those of al-Hasan b. Harun, especially in view of this narration.

[107.](#) Hashim al-Hasam, op. cit., II, 568.

[108.](#) Javad Ali op. cit., in Der Islam, XXV (1939), 205.

[109.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 235.

[110.](#) al-Najashi, 65.

[111.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 260.

[112.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 232. Although Ibn Barina states that the location of the grave was on the western side of Baghdad, today there is a grave within a mosque located in an avenue leading to the Maydan crossroad on the eastern side of Baghdad. The Imamites believe that this is the grave of 'Uthman b. Said.

[113.](#) T. al-Ghayba, 232–3.

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