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A Brief Biography of Al-Mufiid

Muhammad ibn Muhammad an-Nu'man ash-Shaykh Abu 'Abdillah al-Mufid, Ibnu 'l-Mu'allim, al-'Ukbari al-Baghdadi (336/948–413/1022) was the teacher of the Shaykhu 't-Taifah, Abu Ja'far at-Tusi, who said of him:

The leadership of the Imamiyyah in his own time devolved upon him; he was foremost in the science and practice of dialectical theology (kalam), a foremost jurist (faqih), and an energetic thinker with an astute mind, always ready to answer . . .1

Three centuries after al-Mufid, the 'Allamah al-Hilli (648/ 1250–726/1325), one of the most well-known and learned of the scholars of the Imamiyyah, said this about him:

[He was] one of the most outstanding shaykhs of the Shi'ah, their leader and their teacher, and all those who came after him relied on him. His preeminence in law (fiqh), theology, and the narration of Tradition (riwayah) is too well known to require description. [He was] the most reliable and learned of his contemporaries, and the leadership of the Imamiyyah in his time devolved uponhim; he was an energetic thinker with an astute mind, always ready to answer . . .2

In the introduction to the Kitabu 't-Tawhid from the Usulu 'l- Kafi I gave a selection from the biographies which Imami scholars of theology wrote of the Shaykh al-Mufid, may Allah be pleased with him, and pointed out his particular theological position, his teachers in theology, and his works in that subject.

Professor 'Irfan 'Abdu 'l-Hamid, the translator of Tashihu 'l- i'tiqad has likewise given, as part of his introduction, a biography of al-Mufid in which he reviews the political life and events of the Shaykh's times, describing the political and sectarian struggle and its complications. Both the adverse and painful effects it had on al-Mufid, as well as the benefit he derived from it, are covered. This is the approach taken here in writing about al-Mufid, lest accusations of sectarianism be levelled by the likes of those who delight in the power of the sword when it falls on the necks of others, but are troubled when the wails and cries of the condemned disturb their own repose, and are even more purturbed when these groans and tragedies are recorded and documented, while they themselves remain unaffected by them.

For this reason apologies should be given in advance to our noble Sunni and Shi'i brethren in case they come across any- thing which may offend them in Professor 'Irfan's book; for none of us, praise be to Allah, have had anything to do with these misfortunes. We ask nothing more of Allah than that He bestows a beneficial life of brotherhood on all Muslims, so that those who come to write the history of our own times will not have to describe it in the same way as the history of that previous age.

There are, however, in what Professor 'Irfan mentions some defects which it will do no harm to point out. What we cite here will suffice to explain our criticisms.

Some comments on Professor 'Irfan's introduction

(a)

Professor 'Irfan says[3] that the Shaykh al-Mufid 'was proud of his purely (as-sarih) Arab ancestry.' He does not give any source for this statement, but what may have led him to this conclusion about al-Mufid was the discovery he made about the latter's ancestry in an-Najashi[4] who traces al-Mufid's lineage back to Ya'rub ibn Qahtan.

Now this was the kind of activity in which an-Najashi revelled as a result of his meticulous concern for genealogies. He wrote a work on the science of genealogy, which he mentioned when he gave his own biography in his Fihrist.[5] His concern for lineage is also apparent in many of the biographies, which he included, and the ancestries of his subjects will be found traced back to the original tribes from which their clans arose.[6]

Apart from an-Najashi, others, such as the Shaykhu 't-Taifah at-Tusi in his al-Fihrist and ar-Rijal, wrote biographies of these people, but they lack the chains of ancestry which an-Najashi mentions.

Our Shaykh al-Mufid – in common with other Muslim scholars and jurists, and even with the devout among the Muslims who are not scholars or jurists – was more excellent in his faith, knowledge, and understanding of the Islamic shari'ah, and nobler in character than that he should console himself by comparison with the pre-Islamic period, or boast about what Allah and His Prophet, may Allah bless him and his Family and grant them peace, had kept the believers away from: they had been warned not to boast of it, nor even to rely on it. The Messenger of Allah said in the famous sermon, which he delivered in Mekkah when Allah granted him victory over it, when He had fulfilled His promise, had strengthened His army, and had alone put the polytheists to flight:

'O people, verily Allah has taken from you the haughtiness of pre-Islam (al-jahiliyyah) and its boasting of ancestors and clans. Men are of two [kinds]: [those who are] pious, God-fearing, ennobled before Allah, and [those who are] sinful, wretched, insignificant before Allah . . . Man springs from Adam, and Allah created Adam from dust. Being Arab does not mean [having] parentage from a [single] father, it means [having] an eloquent language, and one who was unable to speak it was not counted as one of them.'

Then he recited Allah's words:

'O people! We created you from male and female, and made you into peoples and tribes that you might know one another. Truly, the most noble of you in Allah's sight is the most God- fearing. Verily, Allah is All-knowing, All-wise' (***al-Hujarat, 49: 13***).[7]

I have not come across any source in which al-Mufid himself cites, or refers to, this lineage of his, nor one in which he mentions, or refers to, an Arab tribe to which he belongs.

(**b**)

Professor ‘Irfan states[8] : 'Among those who wrote elegies on [al-Mufid] was his pupil, the Sharif ar-Radi.' This can only be a slip or an unintended mistake. The Sharif ar-Radi died in the year 406/1015, two years before the death of his teacher, al-Mufid. The one who elegized him was another of his students, ar-Radi's brother, the Sharif al-Murtada, who died in 436/1044, who elegized him with a qasidah rhyming in mim of thirty-three verses.[9]

The extent of Al-Mufid's relations with As-Saduq

This book, Tashihu 'l-i‘tiqad, is a commentary on the book I‘tiqadatu 'l-Imamiyyah, written by as-Saduq, the Shaykh Abu Ja‘far Muhammad ibn ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn, Ibn Babawayh, al- Qummi (c 306/919–381/991). In this book, the Shaykh al-Mufid comments on the places in which he disagrees with what as- Saduq said, either in matters of independent reasoning, or con- cerning the evidence upon which as-Saduq relies, or on the grounds of the nature of the argumentation where they agree upon the evidence. Some discussion of this aspect will follow.

As for the connection between al-Mufid and as-Saduq, as- Saduq was one of those with whom al-Mufid studied in the early years of his life when he was not yet twenty years old. al- Mufid studied with him when as-Saduq was in Baghdad, and heard Traditions from him. He received his authorization (ijazah) to transmit his writings and his narrations of Traditions; thus as- Saduq was one of al-Mufid's mentors in Traditions. I believe that the duration of this relationship was short for the following reason.

As-Saduq was born and raised in Qum and then emigrated to Rayy, where he resided until he died. He travelled in search of Traditions and other material, and made a journey to Iraq on his way to the hajj. As-Saduq himself mentions that he came to Baghdad on his way to the hajj in the year 352/963.[10] It appears that he came to Baghdad towards the end of that year, because he left Rayy on a pilgrimage to Mashhad (of ar-Rida, peace be upon him) in the middle of that year.[11]

His hajj was in the following year, 353/964, so he must have left Baghdad in the middle of the year, considering the conditions of travel in those days, and the time, which it would have taken him to cover the distance and carry out the rites of the hajj.

What indicates this chronology of events is that as-Saduq mentions that he was in Fayd (a town half-way between Kufah and Makkah)[12] in 354/965 after completing the hajj to the House of Allah,[13] and that he reached Kufah in the middle of that year.[14]

In the same year, on his way back from Madinah, he was in Hamadan, in Iran, relatively near to his home-town of Rayy if considered in relation to Kufah.[15] It is inconceivable that he should have performed the hajj in the same year, 354/965, in which he was in Fayd on his return, then in Kufah and later in Hamadan. The hajj only occurs in the last month of the lunar year, and in the light of all this it can be concluded that as-Saduq could only have stayed in Baghdad a few months, not a complete year, and that these months were at the end of 352/ 963 and at the beginning of the following year.

One therefore has to disagree with what an-Najashi states about as-Saduq reaching Baghdad in 355/966[16] and all those who dated his entering Baghdad to that year took this from him because this would necessarily mean either that he returned there from Hamadan, where he was in 354/965, when he was half-way back to Rayy, or that he headed back to Baghdad a second time after reaching Rayy, and that would seem to be very far-fetched.

Whatever may have happened, the Shaykh as-Saduq reached Baghdad, narrated, and also heard, Traditions there. The Imami shaykhs studied with him, according to an-Najashi, and among them was the Shaykh al-Mufid. Naturally, in such a short time his lectures could not have included all his books and narrations, and most of them must have been narrations by proxy, not his own lectures in the strict sense of the word.

The relationship between these two men according to what I have mentioned was not a master/pupil relationship, in the strict sense of these terms, such that as-Saduq can be counted, as he is by Professor ‘Irfan in the introduction to this translation, as one of al-Mufid's teachers. It is accurate to distinguish in this discussion between being a teacher's student and acquiring Traditions from a shaykh. In the strict sense, al-Mufid had only four teachers who were scholars of theology, and these were enumerated in my earlier biography of him; and in the legal sciences such as (fiqh), and hadith there was a single teacher, with whom al-Mufid studied for many years and 'from whom he acquired what he knew', as his biographers state, and this was the Shaykh Abu 'l-Qasim Ja‘far ibn Muhammad ibn Ja‘far Musa, Ibn Qulawayh, al-Qummi, later al-Baghdadi (c 282/898–368/979). When al-Mufid died, he was buried beside the grave of his teacher in the holy shrine at Kazimayn [Iraq].

Differences in how ideas are argued do not reflect differences in the ideas themselves

Before we enter the main part of the discussion of the dog- matics of the Imamis and their two schools of Tradition and theology, a fact of the utmost importance must be stated right at the beginning, one which it would be an error to leave un- noticed or ignored, which is that it is necessary to distinguish between a given belief as such and the demonstration of that belief and how it is attained. Opinion can

concur on one of the principal dogmas while the demonstrations which establish that principle can differ.

For example, unicity (tawhid) is the most important principal dogma of Islam, and no Muslim can be counted as such unless he acknowledges it and those attributes of the Creator or the aspects of His Oneness which establish the necessity of belief. However, there are differences in the way in which unicity and the attestation of the Creator are summarily demonstrated, or in which their details are elaborated. These demonstrations can depend on the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, or they can depend on intellectual proofs. This difference in the kind of proof, or in the nature of the demonstration, be it right or wrong, does not necessarily mean there is a difference in the dogma itself.

It would be possible to give dozens of examples of this. The Imamate, according to the meaning of it in which the Imamis believe, by which they are distinguished from other Muslim sects, is a dogma which all the Imamis share. In its very nature it is a matter, which depends on transmission, i.e., the Qur'an and the Sunnah, but there are serious differences in its demonstration, and between one scholar and another there can be total disagreement. We may find one scholar exclusively citing Qur'anic verses and Traditions, while another, who cites, alongside what is called 'transmitted proofs', intellectual proofs, within the limits within which this kind of discussion is bound by intellectual proofs and their particular domain.

If the well known debates of, the famous Imami theologian, on the Imamate are referred to,[17] a great difference will be found between him and many who gave theological arguments for the Imamate, whether they were contemporary with him or came after him. It is not only that Hisham quoted Traditions without discussion and opinion, explanation and commentary, but frequently he did not quote a specific Tradition verbatim and referred only to the meaning and recited its contents as if it were he who was saying it.

One of the clearest examples of what is being discussed can be found in the difference between I'tiqadatu 'l–Imamiyyah by our Shaykh as–Saduq, and Tashihu 'l–i'tiqad by our Shaykh al– Mufid, as will be shown. Moreover, a single author, such as al– Mufid, differs in the kind of discussion he uses from one place to another. A good example occurs in the introduction which al– Mufid wrote for the Kitabu 'l–Irshad, in one part of which he employed the style of hadith quotation, and in another the style of dialectical theology; and yet both sections are concerned with exactly the same topic.

This is not to say that the Imamiy–yah differed on the subject of the Imamate itself, or its meaning and special characteristics; however, it is correct for us to distinguish between two schools among them: that of Tradition, and that of dialectical theology. Moreover, it is the case that their approaches differed with respect to the study of the Imamate.

For a precise examination, which does not jump to conclusions on the basis of those instances in which we initially find difference and disagreement in the substance of the two approaches, we must carefully consider the effect these methods had upon the fundamental conclusions which their adherents arrived

at, and then weigh the results one against the other not the methods utilized to reach these results. In the light of this, we can then conclude whether there really was a difference in opinion or belief; otherwise, the consideration of mere method– ological differences will lead to erroneous assumptions about differences in the principle of the belief, which each method supports or refutes.

Those beliefs which are incumbent on believers and those which are not

It is now necessary to turn our attention to what the Shaykh as– Saduq states in I'tiqadatu 'l–Imamiyyah, to the additions the Shaykh al–Mufid makes in Tashihu 'l–i'tiqad, and to what they both say, in general, about the beliefs of the Imamiyyah. What follows divides itself into two sections, something which is not specific to the beliefs of the Imamiyyah alone, but is in fact generally the case with Muslim dogmatics; nevertheless, we shall restrict our discussion to the Imamiyyah.

a) The beliefs, which true faith, requires of every responsible individual (mukallaf): A Muslim cannot be considered one of the Imamiyyah unless he maintains all of these. No one of them is excused for not knowing them, and, because of that, the ignorant person has to attain knowledge in such a way that he can learn proofs and ways of thinking so that the true faith is produced in him through knowledge and peace of mind.

The five dogmatic principles are, in brief: Unicity (tawhid), i.e. that Allah, Eternal, All–Powerful, and All–Wise, is alone the Creator, and is alone to be worshipped, without associates in either creation or worship; Justice ('adl), meaning that Allah, praise be upon Him, does not oppress or persecute, not because he is unable to do so, but rather because His essence is divine perfection, free from evil–doing, and never without good; the Hereafter (ma'ad), the meaning of which is clear and does not vary between Muslims; Prophet hood (nubuwwah), which is the belief in the message of the Prophet of Islam, may Allah bless him and his family and grant them salvation, and that he is the seal of the prophets, after whom no prophet will appear, and that the Holy Qur'an is the book which Allah sent down to him as proof of his prophet hood and a manifestation of His message; and the Imamate, the explanation of which will follow.

b) Elaborations on the issues of Unicity, Justice, the Hereafter,Prophethood, and the Imamate: It is not necessary that every mukallaf that is, everyone who has the necessary prerequisites for responsibility for his duties should know these details; nor does he have to learn about these elaborations to the point where he believes in them – as, on the contrary, it is necessary for him to learn how to pray, for example, in order to be able to perform the prayer–; ignorance in these cases is pardonable. Most of the contents of the book I'tiqadau 'l–Imamiyyah, with respect to the elaborations on the five principles we have indicated, belong to this second category. Our Shaykh as–Saduq did not intend to clarify simply those beliefs incumbent upon the individual, but rather those beliefs, which the Imamiyyah hold as a whole, whether or not such a belief was requisite. The intention in this was to give a clear,

comprehensible picture of the doctrines of the Imamiyyah in matters which had caused concern among certain Muslims, whether there was agreement in the matter or not.

I have made this point in order that we may avoid gross mistakes or inaccuracy in understanding the Imamiyyah and their beliefs. As a single example of learned and detailed inves- tigation to this effect, one has the work of a scholar who is considered one of the most renowned Imami scholars and fuqaha', the Shaykh Murtada al-Ansari (1214/1800–1281/1864), in his well-known textbook Faraidu 'l-usul, which is famous as ar-Rasail, where he discusses the problem of the sufficiency of probable opinion (zann) in the principles of the religion; and there are additionally the glosses which a group of the greatest and the most knowledgable mujtahids and jurists of the Imamiyyah in recent times have written on it.[18]

1. al-Fihrist, p.186.
2. Khulasatu '1-aqwal, p.147.
3. The Emendationof A Shi'ite Creed, Intro., p.3.
4. 4 al-Fihrist (Bombay, 1317), p.283-4.
5. Ibid., p.74.
6. See ibid., pp.7, 16, 59, 77, 90, 93, 97, 125, 145, 158-9, 162, 190, 202, 281- 2, 297-8, and 305.
7. al-Kulayni, al-Kafi, vol.8, p.246; al-Husayn ibn Sa'id, al-Mu'min, p.56; al- Majlisi, al-Bihar, vol.21, pp.137, 138; vol.73, p.293; at-Tirmidhi, as-Sahih, vol.5, pp.389, 734, 735; Abu Dawud, as-Sunan, vol.4, p.331; Ahmad, al- Musnad, vol.2, pp.361, 523-4; Ibn Hisham, as-Sirah, vol.4, pp.54-55; al- Waqidi, al-Maghazi, vol.2, pp.835-7; Ibn Sa'd, at-Tabaqat, vol.2 pt.1, p.103; at-Tabari, at-Tarikh, vol.1, p1642.
8. The Emendation of A Shi'ite Creed, Intro., p.4.
9. Diwanu 'l-Murtada, vol.3, pp.204-6.
10. 'Uyunu 'l-akhbar, vol.1, pp.59 & 279; Kamalu 'd-din, vol.1, pp.93, & 277.
11. 'Uyunu 'l-akhbar, vol.1, pp.14, 99, 118, 178, 209; vol.2, pp.99, 121, 238, &279; Ma'ani 'l-akhbar, p.145; at-Tawhid, p.406.
12. Mu'jamu '1-buldan, vol.4, p.282.
13. 'Uyunu 'l-akhbar, vol.2, p.57.
14. Ibid., vol.1, pp.81, 129, 138, 144, 249-50, & 262; al-Amali, vol.2, pp.13, 65, 93, and many other places; al-Khisal, vol.1, pp.46, 57, 83; vol.2, pp.13, 65,& 93.
15. al-Khisal, vol.1, pp.106, 295 & 320; at-Tawhid, p.77.
16. al-Fihrist, (Bombay, 1317), p.276.
17. See, e.g., al-Kafi, vol.I, pp.171-3; al-Kishshi, pp.258-63; Kamalu 'd-din, vol.20, pp.362-8; al-Khisal, vol.1, p.215; Majma'u 'r-rijal, vol.6, pp.218-21; al-Bihar, vol.48, pp.189-93, 197-203.
18. ar-Rasail, offset, Tehran, 1377, pp.230-42.

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