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Preface

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين والصلاة والسلام على

رسوله المجتبى ابي القاسم محمد المصطفى واله الطيبين الطاهرين

ولا سيما بقية الله في ارضه الحجة المنتظر القائم المهدي ارواحنا له الفداء

This is the translation of Mukhtasaru Ithbati 'r-Raj'ah (Abridged Ithbati 'r-Raj'ah). The original book of which this is an abridgement was by Abu Muhammad al-Fadl ibn Shadhan ibn al-Khalil al-Azdi an-Nishapuri.

The Author

Al-Fadl ibn Shadhan was a highly respected jurisprudent (faqih) and theologian (mutakallim) of the third century of hijrah. He lived in Nishapur (Khurasan). Ash-Shaykh at-Tusi (d. 460[1]) writes about him: "Afaqih and mutakallim of sublime honour; he has written many books and works." While listing thirty-two of his works, Shaykh at-Tusi has also mentioned Ithbatu 'r-Raj'ah.[2]

Ash-Shaykh an-Najashi (d, 450) writes under his name: "His father was of the companions of Yunus [ibn 'Abdu 'r-Rahman], and [Al-Fadl ibn Shadhan] narrated ahadith from Abu Ja'far ath-Thani [i.e. Imam Muhammad at-Taqi], and it is said that he also narrated from ar-Rida (peace be upon them)[3].

He was thiqah (trustworthy); one of our companions who were [counted as] faqih and mutakallim; he enjoys a great respect in this sect [i.e. in the Shi'ahs]; he, in his honour and distinction, is too well-

known to need any description. Al-Kanji[4] has said that he had written one hundred and eighty books. Then listing forty-eight of his books which he had in his possession, he mentions three books about the twelfth Imam (A.S.): Ithbatu 'r-Raj'ah,ar-Raj'ah hadith and Kitab al-Qa'im (peace be upon him)."[5]

Ibn Da'ud al-Hilli (d. 707) writes about him, "He was one of the great jurisprudents and theologians of the Shi'a faith. His status is too high to need any mention." [6]

It is reported that al-Fadl ibn Shadhan once sent someone to Samarra to Abu Muhammad al-Hasan al-'Askari (peace be upon him); when the messenger wanted to leave, a book of al-Fadl dropped down. The Imam took it up, read it and said, "Allah's mercy be on al-Fadl." (Another narration says that the Imam repeated this prayer three times.) He also reported that the Imam said, "I envy the people of Khurasan because of al-Fadl ibn Shadhan and because he lives among them."

Ash-Shaykh at-Tusi has counted al-Fadl ibn Shadhan, in his Rijal, among the companions of the tenth and eleventh Imams (A.S.). It is thus clear that he narrated ahadith directly from two Imams, and was a companion of four Imams (peace be upon them). His father had narrated ahadith from the seventh Imam (A.S.).[7]

Al-Fadl once said, "I am the successor of those who have passed away. I met (and received a(u1dith and knowledge) from Muhammad ibn Abi 'Umayr, Safwan ibn Yahya and others, and have preserved their legacy since last fifty years; when Hisham ibn al-Hakam (may Allah have mercy on him) passed away, Yunus ibn 'Abdu 'r-Rahman (may Allah have mercy on him) carried his torch and used to reply [our] adversaries; then Yunus ibn 'Abdu 'r-Rahman died and left no one in his place except as-Sakkak, and he rebutted the adversaries' [arguments], until he too passed away (may Allah have mercy on him), and now I am their successor after them, may Allah have mercy on them."[8]

In his last days, al-Fadl ibn Shadhan was at Bayhaq (a town in Khurasan) when news came that the Kharijites were proceeding towards that town. He fled from Bayhaq; but faced so many difficulties in the journey that he became seriously ill and died of the same illness.[9] His death occurred in 260, the same year when Imam Hasan al-'Askari (peace be upon him) was martyred.

Booraq, "a man among our companions well-known for his truthfulness, righteousness, piety and goodness", went for hajj when al-Fadl was seriously ill. On his return journey, he went to Samarra' to pay his respects to the eleventh Imam (A.S.). During the visit he said to the Imam (A.S.): "Al-Fadl ibn Shadhan is seriously ill.

Some people say that it has happened because you are annoyed with him, as they reportedly had told you that al-Fadl had said that the successor of Ibrahim was better than the successor of Muhammad (S.A.W.). But he had not said anything like this, may I be your ransom! They had told a lie against him." The Imam (A.S.) said, "Yes, they had told a lie against him. May Allah have mercy on al-Fadl! May Allah have mercy on al-Fadl." When Booraq returned, he found that al-Fadl had died in the same days when the Imam (A.S.) had said "May Allah have mercy on al-Fadl."[10]

As all reports agree that al-Fadl died in 260, obviously Booraq had gone for hajj in 259. After completing the rituals of hajj and ziyarat, he went to Iraq, and must have reached Samarra' in the first 10 or 15 days of Muharram in 260, when the above mentioned conversation took place. It means that al-Fadl had died in early Muharram 260, i.e. nearly two months before Imam Hasan al-'Askari, (peace be upon him) who was martyred on the eighth of Rabi'u 'l-awwal, 260. His mausoleum is in old Nishapur, a short distance from the present town.[11]

The Book

Unfortunately, almost all books of Ibn Shadhan are now lost.[12] Their fate was not different from thousands of other books written by the companions of the Imams (Peace be upon them).

It appears from an-Najashi's book that Ibn Shadhan had written two books on the subject of Raj'at (Return): Ithbiitu 'r-Raj'ah and ar-Raj 'ah badith while ash-Shaykh at-Tusi has mentioned only the former.

The Shaykh of our mashayekh, late Agha Buzurg Tehrani (died 1389) has mentioned the two books and their abridgements in five places in his magnum opus, adh-Dhari 'ah:

a. as Ithbiitu 'r-Raj'ah (vol. 1. No. 450)

b. as ar-Raj'ah wa abiidithuha (vol. 10. No. 294)

c. as Kitiibu 'l-Ghaybah (vol. 16, No. 395)

d. as Mukhta$aru 'l-Ghaybah (vol. 20, No 2574)

e. as Muntakhabu Ithbiiti 'r-Raj'ah (vol.22 No. 7472)

On pondering on the above entries in conjunction with the recently published Kitiib Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilali,[13] the following informations have been gleaned:

A. A manuscript of Ithbatu 'r-Raj'ah was with as-Sayyid Muhammad ibn Muhammad Mir Lawhi al-Husayni al-Musawi as-Sabzawari, who was a contemporary of al-'Allamah al-Majlisi and both lived in the same city, Isfahan. Mir Lawhi refused to show it to al-Majlisi or to allow him to make its copy. The relations between them were not good. If he had given its copy to al-Majlisi he could have saved one more treasure from extinction; perhaps he would have preserved it in its original form by putting it in a separate chapter, as he had done with at-Tawhid of Mufaddal and many such books. Mir Lawhi has written a book, Kifayatu 'l-Muhtadi fi Ma'rifati 'l-Mahdi, in which he has collected forty ahadith from Ithbatu 'r-Raj 'ah of al-Fadl ibn Shadhan, Kitabu 'l-Ghaybah of al-Hasan ibn Hamzah al-Mar'ashi, and al-Faraj al-Kabir of Muhammad ibn Hibatullah at-Tarabulisi.[14] The traditions quoted from Ithbatu 'r-Raj'ah support the view that he had access to the complete book, not just its selection. Let us pray that

someone unearths that manuscript–if it is still existent.

Mukhtasaru Ithbiiti 'r–Raj'ah: This abridgement of Ithbatu 'r–Raj 'ah was made by, "a learned traditionalist". Possibly, it was done by as–Sayyid Baha'u 'd–Din 'Ali ibn Ghayathu 'd–Din 'Abdu '1–Karim ibn 'Abdu '1–Hamid an–Nili an–Najafi (9th century). Agha Buzurg had seen its copy in the library of the well–known mujtahid, ash–Shaykh Muhammad as–Samawi (d. 1370). The copy was transcribed by the famous muhaddith, ash–Saykh Muhmmad ibn al–Hasan al–Hurr al– 'Amili (d.1104), whose Wasa'ilu 'sh–Shi'ah is indispensable for religious scholars and jurisprudents, and is one of the three "Hadith–Collections of the Later period". It appears from various seals and writings on the back of that manuscript that before coming into the possession of ash Shaykh as–Samawi, it had passed through the hands of many scholars and 'ulama' . After his death it was given to the Library of Ayatullah Muhsin al–Hakim (Najaf); and it is mentioned in the catalogue of the Library (vol. 1, No. 316) as Mukhtasaru Ithbati 'r–Raj 'ah, and it is with this name that it has been published in Turathuna, as will be seen later.

B. Here a short note on adh–Dhari 'ah's entries will not be out of place. Agha Buzurg Tehrani, while describing Ithbatu 'r–Raj 'ah and ar–Raj 'ah wa abadithuha, has clearly said that these two titles were of two separate works. He also writes about the latter book that it is also called Kitabu 'l–Ghaybah.

According to our present information, no scholar before al–Muhaddith an–Nuri has called it "Kitabu 'l–Ghaybah". Baha'u 'd–Din an–Nili an–Najafi, who abridged one of the two books of al–Fadl, writes at the end: "This is the end of what we have selected from the Kitab of al–Fadl ibn Shadhan." Mir Lawhi who copied ahadith from the Kitab of al–Fadl in Kifayatu 'l Muhatadi, clearly gives references of Ithbatu 'r–Raj'ah. The abridgement which we have translated begins with the sentence, "This is a short selection from the book, Ithbatu 'r–Raj 'ah..:'

Then came al–Muhaddith an–Nuri (d. 1320) who probably thought that Ithbatu 'r–Raj'ah and ar–Raj 'ahwa ahadithuha were one and the same, and because the book(s) contained ahadith on Occultation and Reappearance, he began referring to it (them!) as Kitabu 'l–Ghaybah and to its Abridgement as Mukhtasaru 'l Ghaybah.

As we have seen, Agha Buzurg clearly believed that the Ithbatu 'r–Raj'ah and ar–Raj 'ah wa ahadithuha were names of two separate books. On the other hand, he also listed the names, Kitabu 'l–Ghaybah and Mukhtasaru 'l–Ghaybah, which his Shaykh, al–Muhaddith an–Nuri, had chosen. The resulting mix–up leaves a person who looks at the five entries together much bewildered. However, it is from these entries that we have gleaned the facts mentioned above.

Another copy is found

For obvious reasons, it was next to impossible for research scholars to have access to the manuscript in Najaf. No one had any inkling of any other copy. Then my late friend, Hujjatul Islam wal Muslimeen as–Sayyid 'Abdul 'Aziz at–Tabataba'i informed the research scholar as–Sayyid Basim al–Musawi that there

was another manuscript in the Library of Astan-e-Quds e-Radawi (Mash-had) in a bound collection No.7442 with the manuscript of two books of ash-Shaykh al-Mufid; the cataloguer had mentioned those two books and overlooked this booklet which covers folios one to eleven.

Working on this information, Mu'assasatu 'Ali '1-Bayt (A.S.), Qum, obtained its photocopy, and as-Sayyid al-Musawi started work on it. His difficulty was that there was no other copy available to enable him to compare, correct and prepare an annotated text. He solved this problem by comparing the ahadith with other later books where a particular ahadith or a similar one was found.

Mu'assasatu 'Ali '1-Bayt (A.S.) published it as a Book Supplement in the 15th issue of its prestigious quarterly academic magazine, Thurathuna, and the late as-Sayyid 'Abdu 'l-'Aziz at-Tabataba'i kindly gave its copy to me.

This English translation

When I heard the sad news of the demise of al-'Allamah al Mul:taqqiq as-Sayyid 'Abdu '1-'Aziz at-Tabataba' i, it came to my mind to translate this Abridged Ithbiitu 'r-Raj'ah into English in memory of my departed friend, who was instrumental in bringing it to light. This translation was done in four days, and I dedicate

its reward (thawiib) to my late friend, may Allah enhance his rank in the hereafter.

According to as-Sayyid Basim al-Musawi, the abridged version contains twenty abiidith, but actually there are twenty-two. (The manuscript does not have any numbering; it is as-Sayyid al Musawi who has put the numbers.) Technically, when the text of a biidith is narrated through another isniid, it is counted as a separate biidith. The fifteenth and eighteenth traditions of the Arabic version thus become four abiidith. I have found one more biidith quoted from the unabridged Ithbiitu 'r-Raj'ah in Kijayatu 'l-Muhtadi[15] which I have added as an Appendix, thus bringing the total to twenty-three ahadith.

Importance of this book

The importance of this book lies in the fact that it was written in the lifetime of Imam Hasan al-'Askari (peace be upon him).

The textual evidence (see hadith no. 12) suggests that the book was written in 258 or soon after that, when the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him) was about three years old. As we know that by end of 259 al-Fadl ibn Shadhan was very seriously ill; therefore, he must have written the book by Ramadan 259. Therefore, the prophecy of the twelfth Imam's Occultation contained in this book cannot be brushed aside as "of late origin".

There are a total of ten ahadith which speak of a long Occultation: one is from Imam Husayn (no. 7), two from Imam Zaynu 'l-'Abidin (nos. 4 and 8), three from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (nos. 3, 5 and 20), one

from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (no.19) and three from Imam Hasan al-'Askari (9th, 10th and 12th), peace be upon them all.

Obviously, the coming Ghaybah was not announced with drum-beats to the general public. Only the most trusted people knew about it. Thus we see al-Fadl ibn Shadhan, with his sublime status and close ties with four Imams (peace be upon them) narrating ten ahadith which speak of a long Occultation. And in another ahadith (no.2) he narrates from the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be on him and his progeny) that the time of his appearance, like that of the Qiyamat, was known only to Allah; and in ahadith no. 8, the fourth Imam (peace be upon him) is reported to highly praise those who will remain steadfast in the Occultation likening them to the mujahidin in front of the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.).

This high praise itself suggests a long Occultation in which people of weak faith will go astray. The same ahadith describes in detail the episode of Ja'far al-Kadhdhab (Ja'far, the liar) - how he would pretend to be an Imam, instigate the ruler against the family of Imam Hasan al-'Askari (peace be upon him) and make endeavors to get the 12th Imam killed.

All these prophecies were penned down at least six months before the events. They contain in themselves the proof of their authenticity; they loudly announce that they have come from the Infallible Ones (peace be upon them). They also give the lie to some people's claim that the idea of Ghaybah was invented by the Shi'a scholars when the expected re-appearance of the Imam did not materialize.

While on this subject, one thing should be made clear. We generally speak of two Occultations; sughra (minor) and kubra (major). The Minor Occultation is counted from the death of Imam Hasan al-'Askari (peace be on him) in 260 to 329, i.e. 69 years. During the Minor Occultation, four Special Deputies, one after another were appointed by the Imam (may Allah hasten his re-appearance) to provide a link between the Imam and the ummah. This system ended by Imam's order in 329 and the Major Occultation began.

When we say Minor and Major Occultations, we do not suggest that there were two separate Occultations. The fact is that it is a single, un-interrupted Occultation from the beginning uptill God knows when. It is not that the Imam had hidden himself for 69 years, and then ended that Occultation by appearing and living among his followers for some time, and then went into Occultation again.

It is only one Long Occultation with progressively intensifying security measures. First, the Imam was under the protection of his father; then he appointed four Special Deputies as the connecting link between him and the ummah; and then in 329, even that link was cut off When a ahadith speaks of two Occultations, one shorter and the other longer, its purpose is to describe the two varying security arrangements, and when another one speaks of one long Occultation, it looks at the fact that the Imam's Occultation would be continuous without any interruption.

Al-Mahdi: The sixth ahadith from the sixth Imam and the twenty third ahadith (given in Appendix) from

the Prophet refer to the twelfth Imam as al-Mahdi. It may clarify the matter to those who say that the twelfth Imam is certainly al-Qa'im, but are in doubt whether or not he is also al-Mahdi.

Malikah: Granddaughter of the Byzantine Emperor: In the ninth ahadith, the Eleventh Imam (peace be on him) says that the mother of the twelfth Imam is the granddaughter of Ceaser, the Byzantine Emperor; and in the 11th ahadith, her name is given as Malikah. I will write, insha-Allah, on these two ahadith later on, giving the biographical details of the Imam's mother (peace be upon her).

The return (ar-raj'ah)

The book's name means "Proof of the Return". It may refer to the re-appearance of Imam al-Mahdi (peace be upon him) after his Occultation; and majority of the ahadith in it point to this meaning. Also, Raj'ah in the Shi'a terminology refers to the partial resurrection, when some selected persons will be resurrected after the re-appearance of Imam al-Mahdi; and two ahadith (no. 7 & 17) briefly mention that resurrection. 16

واخر دعوانا ان الحمد لله رب العالمين

25th Muharram, 1417
Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi
12th June, 1996
Toronto

1. Unless otherwise specified, all dates in this preface refer to the hijrah lunar calendar.
2. At-Tusi, al-Fihrist (Qum ed.) p. 124, entry no. 552.
3. It is undoubtedly true that Ibn Shiidhan narrated from Imam ar-Rida as may be seen in a-Saduq's books, 'Uyum Akhbar 'r-Rida and 'llalu 'sh- Shara 'i' and in several chapters of his Man la Yahduruhu 'l-Faqih.
4. Abu 'l-Qasim Yahya ibn Zakariya al-Kanji had met Imam Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.); at-Tal'akbari took abadith from him in 318A.H.; at that time his age had exceeded 120years. See Rijal an-Najiishi, vol. 2 (Beirut, 1988) p. 168, fn no. 2
5. Rijal an-Najashi, vol. 2, p. 168, no. 838.
6. ibn Da'ud, Rijal (Qum ed.) p. 151, no. 1200.
7. Al-Khu 'i, Mu 'jam Rijali 'l-Hadith, vol. 13, pp. 298 (no. 9355).
8. Ikhtiyar Rijali 'l-Kashshi, vol. 2, pp. 817.
9. Ibid, p. 818.
10. Ibid. pp. 817-818.
11. Jalalu 'd-din al-Urmawi in the preface to Ibn Shadhan, al-idah, pp. 48-52. There are also two photographs of the building and the dome in the book.
12. His one book, al-idah, has been edited and published with annotations and an elaborate preface by Sayyid Jalalu ' d-din al-Husayni al-Muhaddith alUrmawi in 1972 by the Tehran University Press. I also believe that as-Saduq has preserved Ibn Shadhan's Kitab al- 'Ilal in its original and complete form in his 'Uyunu Akhbar ar-Rida, vol. 2, chapter 33 as well as in his 'llalu 'sh-Shara'i ', vol. I (Najaf, 1385 AH/1960 CE) pp. 251-275.
13. In 3 volumes with comprehensive tahqiq (introduction) and istidrakat (appendixes) by ash-Shaykh Muhammad Baqir al-Ansari, Qum, 1415 A.H.

14. It has recently been published in Iran by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance , Tehran, in 1373 H. Solar.

15. As quoted in Kitab Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilali.

16. To further understand this phenomenon of Raj'ah in the sense of partial resurrection , see my article, The Belief in Raj 'at, which was published in The Light (Dar-es-Salaam) in 1991, and reprinted with some amendments in The Right Path (Toronto) in 1994.

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