Abstract
Seeing the Proof: The Question of Contacting the Hidden Imam in Early Twelver Shi'i Islam

Omid Ghaemmaghami
Doctor of Philosophy

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Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Toronto

The history of what has come to be known as Twelver Shi'i Islam since the late 3rd/9th century is a history of attempts to deal with the abrupt loss of the Imam. According to the Imami/Twelver Shi'a, the final Imam, known most famously as the Qa'im and Mahdi, did not die like the Prophet Muhammad and the previous eleven Imams but rather concealed himself (commonly referred to as the Imam’s ghayba or occultation) and continues to be physically alive on earth while waiting for the appointed time of his (re)appearance. A letter said to have been dictated by the Imam in the year 329/941 on the eve of what has come to be known as the period of the Greater Occultation declared anyone who claims to see him before his return a “lying impostor.” Based on a critical study of this letter and the earliest extant Shi'i sources concerning the occultation and in particular the question of seeing and contacting the Hidden Imam, this dissertation will show that in the early years of the Greater Occultation, Shi'i authorities maintained that seeing the Imam was no longer possible. This position, however, proved untenable to maintain before historical exigencies and the incessant longing for direct contact with the Imam. Almost a century after the start of the Greater Occultation, prominent scholars began to concede the possibility that some Shi'a can see the Hidden Imam, thus foreshadowing a radical shift. A century later, accounts began to appear detailing encounters between the Imam and the most privileged of his votaries in a wakeful state. In the earliest accounts, the Imam is most often presented as a healer and miracle-worker. It is much later, after the Imam’s final letter had been negotiated, that the stories of encounters with him began to grow in number and become more embellished. While the Imam continues working miracles, in some of these later accounts, he also answers vexing legal or theological questions to prominent Shi'i ulama, in essence providing the same direct knowledge to his de facto surrogates that is believed to have been suspended when the Greater Occultation began.
For Mámán Ján, Bába Ján, Elham and Mina - with Love
It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see.

Henry David Thoreau

On ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur

L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
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*Bibliography*
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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND STYLE

The transliteration of Arabic and Persian words, names, and titles follows the official “IJMES (International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies) Transliteration Chart” with some minor modifications. For consistency, a distinction has not been made in transliterating consonants found in both Persian and Arabic, except in that ‘v’ is used for the Persian consonant vāv instead of ‘w.’ Any transliteration found in quoted passages has been left intact. Words of Persian or Arabic origin found in common English lexicons (e.g., hadith, ulama, Islam) have not been transliterated. Whenever two dates are provided and separated by a (/), they denote AH (Anno Hegirae) and AD (Anno Domini), unless otherwise abbreviated by AS (Anno Shamsi). Documentation follows an abbreviated form of the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition, with minor adaptations. Encyclopedia entries cited in the notes appear in the following format: Author, “Name of entry,” Name of encyclopedia, volume number: page number. Abbreviations used throughout this work for printed and online editions of encyclopedia articles are as follows:

DJI: Dânîshnâmah-yi jahân-i islâmî (Tehran, 1375AS/1996-)
DJI (online edition): Dânîshnâmah-yi jahân-i islâmî
Available online: http://www.encyclopaediaislamica.com/
DMBI (online edition): Dâ’irat al-ma’ârif-i buzurg-i islâmî
Available online: http://www.cgie.org.ir/debaf.asp?id=121
DMT: Dâ’irat al-ma’ârif-i tâshayyu‘ (Tehran, 1366AS/1988-)
EI³ (online edition): The Encyclopaedia of Islam (3rd edition, 2007-)
Available online: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3
Elr: Encyclopædia Iranica (London, 1982-)
Elr (online edition): Encyclopædia Iranica (New York, 1996-)
Available online: http://www.iranicaonline.org/
EQ: Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ân (Leiden, 2001-2006)
Available online: http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/Public/book_oew.html
General Introduction

“(Before I reappear), some will come to my Shīʿa claiming to have seen (me) with their own eyes. But beware! Anyone who claims to have seen (me) before the appearance of al-Sufyānī and [the sounding of] the Cry is a lying imposter.”¹

“I was present that day in ‘Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī Bahṛ al-ʿUlūm’s class.² As he smoked his water piper, someone asked whether or not it is possible to see the comely countenance [of the Hidden Imam] during the Greater Occultation. (Bahṛ al-ʿUlūm) did not respond. He dropped his head and grew pensive. I then heard him whisper to himself: ‘What can I say? How can I tell him that (the Imam), the blessings of God rest upon him, held me in his arms and embraced me, knowing as I do that according to a hadith, we must disbelieve anyone who claims to see him during his occultation?’ He repeated these words under his breath several times. Finally, he answered the questioner: ‘The Traditions of the Holy Family teach us that we must disbelieve anyone who claims to see the (Hidden Imam).’ He said nothing more and did not make the slightest allusion to the words I had heard him say under his breath.”³

¹ The last words of the Hidden Imam from his final written message. For an extensive discussion, see chapter 3 of the present work.

² Muḥammad b. Mahdī b. Ṭurṭūjī b. Ṭabāṭabāʾī al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1212/1797), known as Bahṛ al-ʿUlūm (the ocean of [all] knowledge), a leading Shīʿī scholar and early luminary of the revived Uṣūlī school of Shīʿī jurisprudence who like most prominent ulama is alleged by his students and/or later ulama to have been favored with several miraculous encounters with the Hidden Imam. On him, see Algar, “Bahṛ-al-ʿUlūm,” EI, 3:504; Gleave, “Bahṛ al-ʿUlūm, Muḥammad Mahdī al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī,” EI³ (online edition).

No other issue has challenged the venture of Twelver Shiʿī Islam more than the ghayba (“absence”) of the twelfth and final Imam.⁴ Hadiths found in the earliest surviving sources demand recognition of and recourse to the Imam of one’s age as inter alia the speaking Qurʾān,⁵ the living source of knowledge,⁶ and one of the three (in some hadiths, five in others)


⁵ See, e.g., al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, Başāʾir al-darajāt, 64 (no. 13), where the Imam is called “God’s mouthpiece” (lisān Allāh al-nāṭiq). On the related principle of the Imam as the speaking book (al-kitāb al-nāṭiq) without which one cannot grasp the true or primal meaning of the silent book (i.e., the Qurʾān itself), see Ayyoub, “The Speaking Qurʾān and the Silent Qurʾān;” Lawson, “Hermeneutics,” Elr, 12:235-9.

⁶ The classic example being the hadith, “He who dies without having an Imam [var., without having known (or recognized) his Imam], dies the death of the ignorant barbarians” (man māta wa-laysa lahu imām[un] [var., wa-lā yā'rif/la-wlam yā'rif imāmahu] māta mītar[un] jāhiliyyar[un]), Ibn Bābūya, al-Imāma wa-l-taḥṣira min al-ḥayra, 83. See also the 5 hadiths mentioned in the first chapter of the Kitāb al-ḥujja of al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī, 1:168-74; 2:398 (no. 5); the 7 hadiths recorded in chapter 25 of al-Nuʿmānī’s al-Ghayba, 350-2; McDermott, The Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), 51; Bar-Asher, Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shiism, 190-2 (section titled, ‘The Duty of Knowing (maʿrifat) the Imam’).
pillars (daʿāʾim) of religion, while condemning ijtihād (exerting oneself through use of individual reasoning and personal conjecture) and trenchantly criticizing rational methods for determining laws and forming doctrines. Yet according to the Imāmī Shīʿa, this living source


9 See, for example, al-Kulaynī, Uṣūl al-kāfī, 1:92-4; Amir-Moezzi, Le Guide divin, 38; Carney, “The Personal Imam.”

10 Imāmī Shīʿī and Imāmiyya are used in this work as technical terms to refer to the proto-Ithnā ʿasharī (Twelver) faction (firqa) that would later (and up to the present day) be primarily known as the Ithnā ʿashariyya (Twelver Shīʿa). In Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ashʿarī al-Qummi’s (d. 299/911-2 or 301/913-4) Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq, 102, the author says that this firqa “is famously known as the Imāmiyya” (al-maʿrūfa bi-l-imāmiyya). As Kohlberg first pointed out, the term Ithnā-ʿashariyya does not appear in extant Imāmī sources until about the year 390/1000 and even during the Buyid period (334-447/945-1055), Imāmī authors continued to prefer older names such as Imāmiyya and Shīʿī/Shīʿa, Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿashariyya,” 521 (note 2); Kohlberg, “Early Attestations of the Term ‘Ithnā ʿAshariyya’,” 351-4. See also Sander, Zwischen Charisma und Ratio: Entwicklungen in der frühen imāmitischen Theologie, 5 (note 2); Amir-Moezzi, Le Guide divin, 247-8. One source these scholars appear to have missed is al-Murtadā’/al-Mufīd, al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra, 321: “Among the firqa we have mentioned (of the firqa that split after the passing of the Ḥasan al-ʿAskari, the eleventh Imam), the only firqa that still exists in our time, which is the year 373/983-4, is the Twelver-Imāmī (al-imāmiyya al-ithnā ʿashariyya) whose followers believe in the Imamate of (al-ʿAskari’s) son and who are certain that he is alive and will continue to live until the time he rises with the sword.” The appellation Ithnā-ʿashariyya was, however, used by non-Shīʿī authors after the ghayba of the twelfth Imam to describe the sect as a way of distinguishing this firqa from other ‘Alid (= Shīʿat ʿAlī) currents (viz., the Zaydiyya and the Ismāʿīliyya). The decision on the part of earlier scholars to largely shun the name Ithnā ʿasharī likely reflects (1) a desire to avoid using an outsider’s nomenclature and (2) an affirmation that their tradition represents the true (and only) Imāmī/Shīʿī tradition, and thus, “true Islam,” what many modern
of knowledge, the lodestar of the faith, has been in a perpetual state of ghayba for more than eleven centuries. When one begins to contemplate the central Shi‘ī belief in the Hidden Imam as *inter alia* the lord of the final age, the master of time, and the path and proof of God to his creatures, we cannot help but be sensitive to the distressing corollaries of his indefinite and inscrutable absence on a community that yearns for his (re)appearance and intervention which will redress the concatenation of wrongs and setbacks believed by the Shi‘a to have been inflicted upon each of their Imams and visited upon their community throughout their history.

One of the most grievous and egregious of these setbacks was the Imam’s forced disappearance itself in the late 3rd/9th century. The intellectual, philosophical, spiritual, social and political history of Shi‘ī Islam since that moment is intrinsically a history of attempts to explain his disappearance, negotiate his absence and answer the burning question of why he does not reappear.

The Imam’s *ghayba* has traditionally been neatly divided into two phases and often uncritically accepted as such. The difference between the two phases is said to be the potential to see and encounter the Imam in one phase and the lack thereof in the other. The first phase is

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Shi‘ī writers call, “the unadulterated Islam of Muḥammad” (*islām-i nāb-i Muḥammadi*), see e.g., Dāvari, *Tašvīr-i imāmān*, 223.
said to have commenced with the Imam’s disappearance as a young child in 260/874. The next seven decades have come to be known as the minor/lesser ghayba” (al-ghayba al-ṣughrā) when the Imam is said to have communicated with his small band of followers via four successive authorized messengers, plenipotentiaries, or representatives (sufarā; sing., safīr), the last of whom died in 329/941. Six days prior to his passing, the final safīr furnished a signed letter (tawqīʿ) from the ensconced Imam, the last among many tawqīʿāt that had been issued in his name during this first phase, announcing that no further intermediaries would be appointed for “the second ghayba” (al-ghayba al-thāniyya) – commonly referred to in later sources as

11 Most Shiʿī scholars mark the start of the Lesser Occultation from the death of the eleventh Imam in 260/874 while a minority argue that the Lesser Occultation began with the twelfth Imam’s birth in 256/870 (the years 255/869 and 258/871-72 are also given in sources for his year of birth).


13 However, scholars have pointed out that in the sources that have survived from the period of the Lesser Occultation, including al-Kulayni’s al-Kāfī, there is no mention of any individuals formally designated as the Imam’s safīr, but rather a network of agents (wukalāʾ) who knew the location of the Imam. See Newman, “Between Qumm and the West,” 95. On the sufarā; see Kohlberg, “Safir 1. In Shiʿism,” Elr, 8:811-2; Klemm, “Die vier sufarā’ des Zwölften Imām Zur formativen Periode der Zwölferšī’a;” and chapter 3 of this dissertation.
“the complete ghayba” (al-ghayba al-tāmma) or “the major/greater ghayba” (al-ghayba al-kubrā) – had dawned. The Imam’s final communication concluded with a stark warning followed by an emphatic declaration quoted in part at the beginning of this introduction. He warned that before he reappears, certain of his followers would attempt to gull others by claiming to have encountered him; but all should know that whoever claimed or was purported to have seen him was a fraud, prone to mendacity. Thus we are presented with the Imam’s final words, quoted for the first time in a work only three decades removed from the start of the Greater Occultation. According to the standard Shi‘ī narrative, this second phase will continue until he emerges from hiding at the end of time, the Imam having abnegated his rights and authority to the jurisprudents (fuqahāʾ) and ulama in the interregnum.¹⁴

The final tawqīʿ of the Hidden Imam has long posed a serious epistemological challenge to the Shi‘a. This dissertation will advance the thesis that initially in the early years of the Greater Occultation, Shi‘ī authorities maintained that all contact with the Imam had been sundered, forcing him to remain forever incommunicado until his (re)appearance. This position,

however, proved untenable to maintain before historical exigencies and the incessant longing for direct contact with the Imam. More than 200 years after the final *tawqīʿ*, accounts begin to appear detailing encounters between the Imam and the most privileged of his votaries. As we will see, the earliest stories are few in number, suggesting a reluctance to break free from the *tawqīʿ*’s gravitational pull. In these early accounts, the Imam is most often presented as a miracle-worker, guiding lost pilgrims and healing seemingly incurable diseases. It is much later that the accounts begin to exponentially increase in number and become more embellished. While the Imam continues working miracles, in some of these later accounts, he also answers vexing legal or theological questions to prominent ulama, in essence providing the same direct knowledge that is believed to have been suspended when the Greater Occultation began, and suggesting that epistemologically, remarkably little has in fact changed about the nature and modality of the *ghayba* from the time of the Lesser Occultation.

Today, the hundreds of stories of contact and encounters with the Hidden Imam form a mode and expression of pious belief represented in biographical and hagiographical sources and constitute a recurring and salient theme in the thousands of books and articles that have been
published in recent years alone in Arabic and Persian on the Shi'i savior. The accounts describing the encounters follow common patterns and utilize a similar stock of devices, images and tropes to describe visions, experiences, and ultimately, relationships enjoyed by a select cadre of Shi'a composed with the concealed Imam.

The compilation and publication of these stories, a process that gained considerable momentum in the last century and a half and continues to demand attention (and garner controversy) has played a significant role in fortifying the doctrine of the ghayba, intensifying faith in the Hidden Imam’s existence, cultivating an aura of sanctity for the ulama as his representatives (strengthening thereby their religious and social influence), and substantively freezing the eschatological tensions within Shi'i Islam while simultaneously mitigating their severity.

**Review of Scholarship**

Despite increased scholarly activity and interest in virtually every aspect of Twelver Shi'i Islam over the last century (in particular since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran),

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15 See e.g., Mahdipûr, *Kitâbnâmah-yi ḥaḍrat-i Mahdi*, published in 1375AS/1996, a slightly annotated bibliography of Arabic and Persian books about the Hidden Imam that introduces 2,066 works; and Bunyâd-i Farhang-i Ḥaḍrat-i Mahdî-i Mawûd, *Kitâbshināsî-i mahdâviyyat*, originally published in 1382AS/2004, that introduces some 3,500 works (i.e. some 75% more books and articles). It would be
progress in the area of Shi‘ī messianism and eschatology has been markedly slow. And while the subject of encounters with the Hidden Imam is well-known among most Shi‘a, it is a relative terra incognita in western scholarship (why this should be so is an important question but need not detain us now). As such, the topic of encounters and contact with the Hidden Imam remains one of the most observable yet paradoxically least noticed features of Shi‘ī Islam, and consequently, least developed subfields of Islamic studies. In fact, other than three contributions by Henry Corbin and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, studies that have been largely descriptive or focused on what are perceived to be the esoteric or initiatory dimensions of these narratives, the subject is one that has not received adequate attention from scholars and has yet to be properly probed for its historical implications in the early period of the Greater Occultation (the main focus of this dissertation). Here we will provide a survey of the key contributions that have been made to the study of this issue while pointing out other lacunae in the secondary literature.

The first scholar in the west to bring attention to the issue of contact with and sightings of the Hidden Imam was the prolific Hungarian Orientalist, Ignác Goldziher (d. 1921). In a footnote in his magisterial Vorlesungen über den Islam (first published in 1910), Goldziher

safe to say that hundreds if not thousands more articles and books have appeared since 2004 on the
refers to “fables” of believers who received letters \(= \text{tawqī'āt}\) from the Hidden Imam and alludes to those who have claimed to have seen him.\(^{16}\) In view of the paucity of Shi‘ī sources

\(^{16}\) Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, 232 [\(=\) Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 201 (note 98)]. Prior to Goldziher, Comte de Gobineau (d. 1882), in his *Trois ans en Asie (de 1855 à 1858)*, 305 (first published in 1859) stated that “les théologiens officiels” claim that the Imam moves from place to place to avoid becoming recognized but made no mention of stories of those who have seen him. British orientalist Edward Browne (d. 1926), who travelled to Iran in 1887, also never refers to the stories of sightings of the Imam but does repeat throughout his works, without ever providing a source, in a *prima facie* manner that “[t]he Shi‘ites hold that (the Hidden Imam) did not die, but disappeared in an underground passage in Surra-man-Ra’a [= Samarra], A.H. 329; [and] that he still lives in one of those mysterious cities, Jābulpā and Jābulsā…” Browne, *A Traveller’s Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb*, 298. (Browne repeats the same assertion in other works, e.g., Browne, *The Tārīkh-i-Jadid or New History of Mīrzā Alí Muhammad the Báb by Mīrzā Huseyn of Hamadān*, 287 (note 1); Browne, “Bábism,” 334 [cited in, Browne, *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne on the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions* (ed. Momen), 408]; Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, 1:246 (note 1); Browne, “Báb, Bábís,” *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 2:300). The idea that the Imam is hiding in the cities of Jābulqā and Jābulsā (alternatively spelled or vowelized as Jābalqā and Jābalsā/Jābulsā/Jābarsā/Jābarṣā) is repeated after Browne throughout western sources up to the present day, but always without a source (other than Browne), see, e.g., Seoharvi, “Bahaism,” 412 (pub. 1907); Gilmore, “Babism,” *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 394 (pub. 1908), who calls Jābulqā and Jābulsā “Arabic utopias;” Friedlaender, “Jewish-Arabic Studies I. Shiitic Elements in Jewish Sectarianism,” 486 (pub. 1912); Sell, *Baháísm* (pub. 1912), 3; Wilson, *Baháísm and its claims*, 20 (pub. 1915); Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam*, 165 (pub. 1985), who states, “The Hidden Imam was popularly supposed to be resident in the far-off cities of Jābulsā and Jābulqā and in former times books were written about persons who had succeeded in travelling to these places;” Walbridge, “The Babi Uprising in Zanjan,” 359 (pub. 1996), who states that the Hidden Imam “lives in the fabulous underground cities of Jabalqa and Jabarsa”; and Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium*, 21-2 (pub. 1998). None of these scholars have provided a primary source for the notions that Jābulqā and Jābulsā are “underground” or that believers have actually travelled to these cities. An in-depth study of Jābulqā and Jābulsā and specifically, their function in Shi‘i sources need not detain us (for now, see Arsanjānī, “Jābulsā wa Jābulqā,” *DMBI* (online edition); Sajjādī and Sayyid-ʿArab, “Jābulqā wa Jābulsā,” *DJI* (online edition)) but we can provide here for the first time a classical source for the myth
available to him and the fact that Shiʿi studies was not his main area of research, it is not surprising that Goldziher did not explore the topic further in his writings. Goldziher’s ‘discovery’ was repeated by Duncan B. MacDonald (d. 1943), the author of the short entry on ghayba in the first edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam. MacDonald added that the Hidden Imam is present, “unrecognized,” at the annual pilgrimage where he “scrutinize[s] the hearts of the believers.” More significantly, MacDonald appears to have been the first scholar to ponder the theological implications of the Imam’s ghayba, drawing a connection between the Imam’s

that the Hidden Imam is in these cities. Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659), in his Lawāmiʿ-i ṣāḥībqirānī, 4:160, an extended Persian translation of his Arabic Rawḍat al-muttaqīn, itself a commentary on al-Shaykh al-Sadūq’s Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh, in commenting on a prayer attributed to the ninth Imam that invokes blessings upon the Qāʾim’s “descendants and family,” avers that it is well-known (mashhūr ast) that the descendants of the Hidden Imam are all currently (al-ḥāl mawjūdand) in Jābulqā and Jābursā. After citing some of the “numerous hadiths” with “sound” chains of transmission from al-Kāfī and Baṣāʾir al-darājāt that describe these cities, al-Majlisī adds, “I have heard from my teachers (mashāyikh) and seen Traditions from the Imams (rivāyāt) stating that the progeny (awlād) of the lord of the amr are in these cities and from time to time, (the Imam) himself also visits these cities” (gāhgāhī nīz ān ḥadrat khūd tashrīf mi-āvarand bih īn shahr-hā). This passage is not found in al-Majlisī’s Arabic commentary, Rawḍat al-muttaqīn. Mahdīpūr, Kitābnāmah-yī, 1:263, has mentioned an unpublished work titled, Jābulqā va Jābulsā, by Muḥammad Bāqīr al-Bahārī al-Hamadānī (d. 1333/1915), that discusses “Traditions (rivāyāt) about Jābulqā, Jābulsā and the residence (iqāmatgāh) of the Mahdī.” Others have cited hadiths that mentions these cities to support the veracity of one of the most elaborate of the encounter narratives, viz., the lengthy account of the “Green Island in the White Sea,” a popular story in the late Safavid and Qajar periods. See, e.g., al-Bāhrānī, Tabsīrat al-walī, 259-64; Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 2:623-5; ʿIrāqī-Maythamī, Dār al-salām, 475. For a study of these texts, see now, Ghaemmaghami, “To the Abode of the Hidden One: The Green Isle in Shiʿī, Early Shaykhī, and Bābī-Bahāʾī Topography.”

authority and the authority of the ulama: “The earlier organization of the sect has been replaced by the presence of independently learned mudjahids in the various Shi‘i centres, recognized by the community as qualified to interpret the Imām’s will.”

Introductory works on Shi‘i Islam have either been silent or treated the theme of encounters with the Imam as at best a minor issue. Dwight Donaldson’s (d. 1976) 1933 monograph, the first book-length survey of Shi‘i Islam in a European language, refers readers to MacDonald’s previous statements in the Encyclopedia of Islam. Moojan Momen’s An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam includes two short but important references to the subject, while Heinz Halm’s Die Schia and Yann Richard’s L’islam chiite: Croyances et idéologies ignore the topic altogether. On the other hand, in his short biographical sketch of the twelve Imams, originally published in 1923, the prolific Anglican canon and missionary Edward Sell (d. 1932)

18 MacDonald, “Ghayba,” EI¹ (online edition; originally published in print in 1927). This entry was slightly expanded by Hodgson in MacDonald/Hodgson, “Ghayba,” EI², 2:1026.


20 Momen, An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam, 165 (mentioned above), 199.

notes the presence of many “fanciful” accounts of the Imam appearing to “his favoured ones” in order to strengthen their faith in his existence.\footnote{Sell, \textit{Ithna ʿAshariyya or The Twelve Shiʿah Imams}, 55.}

Studies on the Mahdī and the Hidden Imam relying on historical methodologies have not really carried matters forward. Blichfeldt’s instructive survey of early Islamic sources on the Mahdī asserts incorrectly that during the Greater Occultation, the Imam’s “followers were shut off from any kind of communication.”\footnote{Blichfeldt, \textit{Early Mahdism}, 9.} Jassim Hussain’s monograph, \textit{The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background}, offers a traditional noncritical picture of the early \textit{ghayba} works. While most of his discussion is reserved for the period of the Lesser Occultation, the penultimate chapter of his book discusses the implications of the Greater Occultation for the Shiʿī community in general and the ulama in particular. However, there are surprisingly no references to the subject of encounters with the Imam in this section.\footnote{Hussain, \textit{The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam}, \textit{Istora} 22, no. 3 (2014): 71–92.}

Hussain’s apologetic treatment of the Hidden Imam has much in common with the only other book-length historical survey of the robust Shiʿī belief in this figure: Abdulaziz Sachedina’s \textit{Islamic Messianism: The idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shiʿism}. In the introduction, Sachedina appears to allude to the topic when stating that “the Imam is not
completely cut off from his followers but has spokesmen, in the person of learned jurists, who can act on his behalf and guide the Shi‘ites in their religious matters.”25 Yet a serious engagement with the issue of encounters is never realized. In a section titled, “The Miraculous Appearance of the Mahdi at the Hajj,” Sachedina devotes all of two paragraphs to the subject. Here he states axiomatically that “the Shi‘ites assert” that the Imam resides in the vicinity of Mecca where he appears each year during the pilgrimage season.26 He then refers readers to several accounts describing encounters with the Imam in Mecca during the Lesser Occultation. Referring to this section of Sachedina’s book, Etan Kohlberg has mistakenly claimed that these encounters occurred during the Greater Occultation27 when in fact all of the accounts that Sachedina has mentioned are from the Lesser Occultation. As is the case with some other parts of his book, Sachedina’s approach here is purely descriptive, uncritical, and even incomplete. Indeed, he gives the impression that he is unaware of the many accounts that describe encounters between the ulama and the Imam during the Greater Occultation. Moreover, it seems that he did not consult any of the works by Henry Corbin on the topic, to say nothing of

24 Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background.*


the relevant primary sources other than sections of al-Majlisi’s *Bihār al-anwār*, written some eight hundred years after the start of the ghayba. Neither his monograph nor the dissertation on which it was based engages any of Corbin’s many contributions to the study of the Twelfth Imam. Elsewhere, in the introduction of his translation of Ayatollah Ibrāhīm Amīnī’s (b. 1304AS/1925) apologetic work, *Dādgustar-i jahān*, Sachedina speaks approvingly of the author’s adduction of “rational arguments to discredit some of the stories about meeting with the twelfth Imam that have been accepted uncritically by some scholars of hadith.”

Etan Kohlberg was the first western scholar to bring attention to two short missives putatively written by the Hidden Imam and presented to one of the ulama in the first century of the Greater Occultation, al-Shaykh al-Mufid. Unfortunately, he does not tell us anything about the content of these letters other than to say that the Imam ordered al-Mufid to not show them to anyone. More importantly, Kohlberg neglects to draw attention to the important fact that none of the works written by al-Mufid or any of his many prolific students or any of the early *rijāl* works mention these letters. As we will see, the earliest work that cites them (without a chain of transmission) was written over a century after al-Mufid’s death. The article also

28 Sachedina, “Doctrine of Mahdism in Imāmī Shīʿism.”

overlooks key passages in al-Mufid’s writings that argue against the possibility of having contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation (on which see chapter 3 of the present work). As a result, no attempt is made to explain the discrepancy between these passages and the two letters allegedly received by al-Mufid.31 Kohlberg proceeds to make a passing reference to seven stories of contact with the Imam – each of which involves a healing or some other supernatural event – before maintaining that “it can be seen that the Imam appears mainly as a consoler or a miracle worker; unlike the situation in the Lesser Occultation, in the Greater Occultation he appears only infrequently in order to answer legal questions.”32 The last part of this statement is puzzling if only because Kohlberg has not provided any examples of the Imam answering legal questions of presumably the ulama or *fuqahāʾ* in his article, though as we will see in chapter 4 of this work, such accounts do exist.

Other books and articles where one would expect a discussion or at least references to the subject are either completely silent or offer barely a whisper. Sachedina’s *The Just Ruler (al-Sulṭān al-ʿĀdil) in Shiʿite Islam* is an ambitious theoretical study of the social and political

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30 On al-Mufid and these letters, see chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation.

31 Kohlberg, “Authoritative Scripture,” 308.

32 Kohlberg, “Authoritative Scripture,” 309.
role of the ulama in the absence of the Imam. Yet here as well we find no mention of the theme of encounters with the Imam. In a study of charismatic authority in Shiʿī Islam along Weberian lines, Liyakat Takim speaks of Shiʿī biographical works “replete with accounts of…miraculous deeds” ascribed to the ulama but fails to offer a single reference to the theme of encounters with the Imams featured in these same works.

The neglect is especially glaring in the numerous studies that have charted the manner in which the sacrosanct authority of the Hidden Imam has been gradually appropriated by the Shiʿī ulama. There is no room here to rehearse the evolution of the role of the ulama in positioning themselves as the “general representatives” of the Hidden Imam and in gradually appropriating and exercising the prerogatives and privileges traditionally reserved for the Imams in the classical sources. The theoretical basis of the ulama’s authority and its historical development has been the subject of numerous studies by Eliash, Madelung, Lambton, Keddie, Sachedina, The Just Ruler (al-Sulṭān al-ʿĀdil) in Shiʿite Islam.

Takim, The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shiʿite Islam, 94.

Chief among these rights are: 1) carrying out the legal punishments or sanctions of the Qurʾan (iqāmat al-ḥudūd); 2) leading the Friday congregational prayer (ṣalāt al-jumʿa) [on the debate among fuqahāʾ concerning whether it is permissible to convene the Friday prayer during the ghayba, see Algar, “Emām-e Jomʿa,” Elr, 8:386-91]; 3) waging defensive holy war (jihād; and 4) receiving the Imam’s share (sahm al-imām) and the khums tax. See now Amir-Moezzi, “Islam in Iran x. The Roots of Political Shiʿism (Aspects of Jurist-Theologian Power),” Elr (online edition), for a succinct description of these four legal domains.
Calder, Algar, Newman, Moaddel, Cole, Litvak, Kazemi-Moussavi, Amanat, Sachedina, Amir Arjomand, and Brunner *inter alios.*36 It is surprising that the issue of encounters with the Imam has received at best scant attention in these studies. In fact, only four scholars from those whose works were listed make significant references to these stories: Madelung,37 Amir Arjomand,38 Amanat,39 and Brunner.40


37 Madelung, “Authority in Twelver Shiism in the Absence of the Imam,” 165: “After (the fourth representative’s) death in 329/941 the greater *ghayba* began when no one was able to get in touch with the imam who may only occasionally appear to a favored one among his followers.” Madelung here is one of the first scholars to mention directly the issue of contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, though he does not further explore the palpable tension in his statement about an unreachable yet reachable Imam.

38 While contextualizing al-Majlisi’s *Haqq al-yaqīn* (which includes stories of encounters with the Imam; on al-Majlisi and this work, see chapter 4) Amir Arjomand makes the following cogent argument: “The Shi‘ite hierocracy [in the Safavid period], while allowing for the intermittent
A lack of serious engagement is consequently reflected in numerous entries published in encyclopedias and reference guides that ignore the issue or speak of it erroneously. Many of the entries in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* and the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* where one might expect at least a reference to the theme of encounters in particular, the comment on 114: “Le message pour les croyants est sans équivoque: pas de salut sans recours aux savants qui donnent accès aux Imams. C’est sans doute là une des raisons principales de la genèse de la puis sante hièrocratie des savants dans le shi’isme.”


41 E.g., “Mahdi,” (Robert S. Kramer) [Kramer’s statement here that the Shi’ā believe the Mahdi to be an “incarnation of God” is patently incorrect]; “Ghaybah” (Andrew Newman); “Intizār” (Yann Richard); “Imam” (Imtiyaz Yūsuf); “Shī‘ī Islam” (Syed Husain M. Jafri, et. Al.); “Messiansim” (Abdulaziz Sachedina); “Imāmah” (Abdulaziz Sachedina); and “Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah” (Abdulaziz Sachedina).

42 E.g., “Muḥammad al-Ḵāʾīm” (J.G.J. ter Haar); “al-Mahdī” (Wilfred Madelung); “Ḵāʾīm Āl Muḥammad” (Wilfred Madelung); and “Imāma.” (Wilfred Madelung). It is hoped that this lacuna will be filled in the new 3rd edition of the *The Encyclopedia of Islam*. 
with the Imam are silent.\textsuperscript{43} In fact, the only entry in \textit{EI}\textsuperscript{2} other than “Ghayba” (MacDonald/Hodgson; see above) that mentions the topic is the article, “Ithnā ʿAshari” (Nasr), though the author focuses exclusively on the other-worldly interpretations of these accounts highlighted or advanced by Henry Corbin (see below).\textsuperscript{44} Three articles in the \textit{Encyclopedia of Religion} [“Shiism: Ithnā ʿAshariyah” (Nasr); “Ghaybah” (Crow); and “Spiritual Guide” (Smithers)] also refer to the issue of sightings of the Imam but again, mention only Corbin’s view of the accounts.\textsuperscript{45}


\textsuperscript{44} Nasr makes similar statements in his introductory books about Islam, e.g., Nasr, \textit{The Heart of Islam}, 72: “(The Hidden Imam) is alive like Elijah, who was taken to Heaven alive according to Jewish belief. But the Twelfth Imām is also the secret master of this world and can appear to those who are in the appropriate spiritual state to see him;” and Nasr, \textit{The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism}, 112, where he suggests without further explanation that the Hidden Imam is a strictly Sufi concept: “…some have achieved the climb [of transcending the ordinary human state] successfully without a human guide, through the agencies of what Sufism calls ‘absent’ or invisible guides (rijāl al-ghayb), such as Khiḍr or the Hidden Imam.” Cf. Nasr, \textit{Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition}, 116, where he defines ghayba as the Imam having “concealed [himself] from the gaze of the outward world,” without any further explanation.

\textsuperscript{45} Cf. the following comment found in the entry, “Ghayba,” by Jamel Velji in the recent published, Campo (ed.), \textit{Encyclopedia of Islam}, 707: “Although the death of the fourth deputy signaled a cessation of formal contact between the imam and his community, the Hidden Imam is thought to be in contact with many of his followers miraculously, through dreams or visions.”
This brings us to Henry Corbin and Mohammad-Ali Amir-Moezzi, the only two scholars who have devoted full-length articles to the topic of encounters with the Imam. It is to a discussion of their contributions that we now turn.

At first, it must be said that it is almost impossible to overestimate the value of Henry Corbin’s many studies on the Hidden Imam in general and the theme of encounters with this figure during the Greater Occultation in particular. Corbin was the first and in some cases remains the only western scholar to have studied rare yet significant sources in Arabic and Persian on the Hidden Imam that mention stories of those who met the Imam. His approach to these sources is largely descriptive, philosophical and phenomenological. In the first of three interrelated studies on the motif, “Au Pays de l’Imām Caché,” Corbin translated three of the accounts: the lengthy story of the Green Island in the White Sea; the account of the archipelago of five islands ruled by the Hidden Imam and his sons; and the account of a believer from Hamadān who encountered the Imam in the desert near Mecca and was miraculously transported back to his home in Iran.\footnote{Corbin, “Au Pays de l’Imām caché,” 31-87.} A condensed version of these accounts was included in the seminal chapter, “\textit{Mundus Imaginalis}.”\footnote{This chapter was published in Corbin’s \textit{Face de Dieu, face de l’homme}. For English translation, see Corbin, “\textit{Mundus Imaginalis}, or the Imaginary and the Imaginal” (trans. Fox).} The three accounts were later republished in the
final volume of his magnum opus, *En Islam iranien*, to which he appended the translation of a
fourth account – the now famous encounter with the Hidden Imam and the Prophet Khîdr at the
Mosque of Jamkarân outside of Qum – but not before adding details of his own pilgrimage to
this site with Seyyed Hossein Nasr in 1962.\(^{48}\) Corbin’s translations are the first of their kind in
any European language. However, they are not verbatim. Moreover, Corbin engages in
interpretative license throughout. Since there are often no markers to separate the translations
from Corbin’s glosses of them, short of consulting the original texts of the accounts, it is
impossible in places to determine if it is the original text that is speaking or Corbin. For
example, throughout his translations, Corbin regularly refers to the imaginal world ( \(‘ālam al-
mithāl\)) and the realm of the placeless (nā-kujā-ābād) giving the impression that such terms are
found in the original texts of the accounts he is translating when in fact they are not.\(^{49}\)

In the opinion of Corbin, the accounts describing meetings with the Imam were a
fecund field of mystical speculation. To the untrained eye, they seemed to be describing events
that transpired in the physical mundane world but Corbin averred that they in fact took place in
“un monde qui reste au-delà du contrôle empirique de nos sens et de nos sciences


\(^{49}\) On the \(‘ālam al-mithāl\), see chapter 2 below.
rationnelles.”

Elsewhere, he maintained that, “A figure like that of the twelfth Imām does not appear and disappear according to the laws of material historicity. He is a supernatural being.”

A firm belief in this metahistorical reality of the Hidden Imam is fused with a deep interest in symbolism. Both are nurtured by Corbin throughout his writings on the Hidden Imam. His approach in the three studies mentioned above is characterized by a sanguinity that the Hidden Imam “dwells on the Green Island in the middle of the Sea of Whiteness,” is “hidden between Heaven and Earth in the ālam al-mithāl,” and can only be encountered in this realm of the simulacra, a realm that possesses a deeper ontological reality and whose topography transcend the limits of the empirical world. The gate to this realm was the phenomena of dreams, ultraphysical visions and other intuitive experiences. Ever the enthusiastic and imaginative reader, Corbin maintained that visions were the portal to the realm of the Hidden Imam:


52 Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 56. On the Green Island, see chapter 4 below.

53 Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 81.
For more than ten centuries the figure of the Hidden Imam [has] dominate[d] all Shi‘ite religious consciousness…Shi‘ism has lived in the company of the mysterious Twelfth Imam, lived in the secret of passionate devotion, in the secret of an eschatological expectation that has never been trapped by imposture… (The Imam) is to be seen only in visionary dreams; if he has been encountered it is realized only after the event. Stories abound, filling volumes.54

Elsewhere, he writes:

L’Imâm caché, jusqu’à l’heure de la parousie, ne se rend visible qu’en songe ou bien en certaines manifestations personnelles qui ont alors le caractère d’événements visionnaires; elles n’interrompent pas le temps de la ghaybat, puisqu’elles se passent justement dans cet « entre-temps » [i.e., in the mundus imaginalis], et qu’elles ne se matérialisent pas dans le courant des faits de l’histoire matérielle que le premier venu peut enregistrer et attester. Les récits de ces visions théophaniques sont nombreux dans les livres shî‘ites…55

Throughout Corbin’s studies on the Hidden Imam, the reader cannot help but sense a feeling of urgency. Corbin was deeply affected by the west’s rejection of the imaginal realm and suppression of the nature and reality of the Unseen.56 He saw in the entire narrative

54 Corbin, “Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality,” 405. This reading is also posited by Hossein Ziai, “Dreams ii: In the Persian Tradition,” EIr, 7:550: “The occultation of the twelfth imam, who possessed a higher visionary knowledge…is of special significance in the Shi‘ite view of dreams, for he ‘resides’ in Ḥūrqalyā [sic], a realm of the imagined world and may thus be ‘seen’ through dreams.”

55 Corbin, En Islam iranien, 4:330. See also Corbin, “Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality,” 406.

56 See Corbin, Corps spirituel et Terre céleste, 20 [= Corbin, Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth (trans. Pearson), xxi. For a representative passage lamenting western civilization, see Corbin, En Islam iranien, 1:8-9.
(ḥikāya) of the Hidden Imam, including the accounts of encounters with him, a hierohistory: “it is a history of real events, but it is not a reality open to critical history.” His contributions to the study of the encounters with the Imam were an attempt to redress the devastating imbalance he saw in the western worldview. Corbin was especially attracted to the masters of the Shaykhiyya for nurturing the mode of the invisible presence of the Imam in the imaginal realm.

Amir-Moezzi followed the descriptive and hermeneutic trajectory laid out by Corbin in his studies of the encounter motif. Resisting the historicist mode, he set out to fulfill a wish expressed by Corbin in his En Islam iranien to categorize the accounts of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation. In his “Contribution á la Typologie des Rencontres avec l’Imám Caché,” Amir-Moezzi introduced a three-part typology “according to the principal role played by the hidden Imam in the encounter: the humanitarian dimension, the initiatory dimension, and the individual eschatological dimension.” Amir-Moezzi mentions only eleven


58 See now, Amir-Moezzi, “Une absence remplie de présences: Herméneutiques de l’occultation chez les Shaykhiyya.”

59 Corbin, En Islam iranien, 4:330: “il y aurait à en opérer le classement typologique.”

60 Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution á la Typologie,” 110.
accounts from the Greater Occultation in this article. He did not translate any of these accounts choosing instead to summarize them in one or two sentences. Briefly, the five accounts that are classified by him under the humanitarian category are those in which the Imam comes to the aid of a desperate believer through for example, healing him of an incurable illness or saving him from being lost in the desert. The six accounts classified under the rubric of initiatory are those in which the Imam reveals certain spiritual knowledge or teaches a specific prayer to his initiate. Finally, the eschatological dimension is that in which “the encounter prompts a believer’s spiritual resurrection.” It is the third dimension that receives most of Amir-Moezzi’s attention since according to him, it has been “the mystics, theosophists, and Imami sufis, who meditated and developed these traditions.”

Amir-Moezzi does not mention any specific accounts in this section. Instead, he discusses the spiritual hermeneutics of some of the accounts offered by modern and contemporary masters of the Shaykhi school and the Dhababi and Khaksari orders. These masters have proposed different forms of the following syllogism: “The Hidden Imam can be seen only at the End of Time, but certain people saw [him], therefore these people reached the


End of Time. The third dimension is elucidated further in Amir-Moezzi’s article on the symbolic and theological hermeneutics of the occultation provided by the masters of the Shaykhiyya. According to this perspective, only through interpretation is one able to perceive the colorful and profound metaphors dormant and latent within the stories. Amir-Moezzis’s concern for the initiatic component of these narratives is perhaps best illustrated by an article written by him, describing his own pilgrimage to the Mosque of the Hidden Imam in Jamkarān.

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64 Amir-Moezzi, “Une absence remplie de presences: Herméneutiques de l'occultation chez les Shaykhiyya.” For English translation of this article, see now, Amir-Moezzi, The Spirituality of Shi’i Islam: Belief and Practices, 461-86.

65 Since the account features many of the elements, devices, and topoi found in some other encounter narratives, especially the story of the Green Island in the White Sea, it is useful to provide a summary here. Amir-Moezzi recounts that in 1973, he was summoned by his father’s dying great-uncle who revealed that fifty years earlier, he himself had made a pilgrimage to Jamkarān. After arriving in the village, a guide showed him an underground city inhabited by companions of the Hidden Imam: “gens de la hiérarchie initiatique occulte” who frequently attained the presence of “the Mystic Pole” (i.e., the Imam). The denizens of this mysterious city, he tells Amir-Moezzi, were men and women, each more radiant and comely than the next. As he gazed upon them, a young man emerged, advanced toward him and began to initiate him into the knowledge of certain divine mysteries. The next thing he knew, he had rejoined his caravan and was midway between Qum and Tehran. A full week had passed. What had happened? Was it all a dream? Does such a city exist? Most importantly, he asked himself: “Le jeune homme qui me parla était-il l’Imâm du Temps lui-même?” Not having dared venture back to Jamkarān, now in the twilight of his life, he summoned his great-great-nephew to ask him to travel there and attempt “découvrir le secret.” Arriving in Jamkarān, Amir-Moezzi met with the same guide, now in advanced age. Each time he attempted to raise the question of the hidden city in the subterranean realm,
The contributions of Corbin and Amir-Moezzi have helped illumine the ways in which a guide-initiate relationship functions in Shi‘ī Islam. To the small sampling of scholars and mystics that they have studied, the Hidden Imam is the apotheosis of the spiritual guide. Corbin maintained that these accounts “represent, preeminently, the archetype of an individual and individuating relationship with a personal heavenly guide.” But while this approach is useful in discussing mystical speculations within Shi‘ī Islam such as those advanced by some modern thinkers, it would be a generalization to apply it to the entire corpus of encounter narratives.

his host politely changed the subject to matters of theology, philosophy and the secret meanings latent in the Qur’an and the hadiths of the Imams. Feeling a cold coming on and overcome with fever, he suddenly thought he heard his host tell him: “Ici, à Jamkarân, le temps passe autrement. Nous sommes ici dans le domaine du Seigneur du Temps, et c’est son temps à lui qui s’écoule ici.” His host then took him to the home of four neighbors. Each time Amir-Moezzi attempted to broach the matter of the hidden city, his hosts changed the topic of conversation. As day turned into night, he boarded the minibus for the fifteen minute ride back to Qum. In a feverish and drowsy state, he began to see a vertiginous mixture of images: his great-great-uncle, the doors of a cellar, the inhabitants of the sanctuary of the Hidden Imam, the monotonous voice of his host, the chants of faceless men in an obscure room, the noise of the engine of the minibus…the driver wakened him. It was Wednesday. He had entered Jamkarân on Sunday. Returning to Tehran, he learned that his family had not heard from him in four days. His great-great-uncle passed away on Monday. Amir-Moezzi, “Jamkarân et Máhán: Deux Pèlerinages Insolites en Iran,” 154-67. This article is conspicuously absent from Amir-Moezzi’s recently published collection of previously published articles on Shi‘ī beliefs, La religion discrète: Croyances et pratiques spirituelles dans l’islam shi‘ite. On the Mosque of Jamkarân, see now Calmard, “Jamkarân,” EIr (online edition). For a analysis of the original story describing an encounter with the Imam in Jamkarân relying on textual criticism, see Ghaemmaghami, “Jamkarân: The Absence of Tradition.”

66 Corbin, “Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality,” 386.
For example, the main source for the most of the stories Corbin and Amir-Moezzi have discussed or mentioned in passing was the nineteenth century Traditionist, Mirzā Ḩusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsi (d. 1320/1902; on him (hereafter, Nūrī), see below passim). However, with the exception of a passing reference by Amir-Moezzi, both have ignored the fact that Nūrī declares Shiʿi mystics to be inimical to the Imams and has jettisoned any attempt to situate the encounter stories he collected and published in any realm but the physical world, dismissing the approach of mystics, theosophists and others interested in esoteric interpretation (ahl-i taʿwil) who speak of the imaginal world (ʿālam-i mithāl) or abodes of the heart (manāzil-i qalbiyyah). Needless to say, Nūrī does not include any of the accounts found in the works of the Dhahabī and Shaykhī leaders but one does not necessarily get this impression from studying Corbin and Amir-Moezzi’s works.

Chapter Outlines

This dissertation will build on the work of previous scholarship while also raising an entirely new set of concerns, questions and methods of investigation. We will focus chiefly, though not only, on the development of the theme of encounters with the Imam in the roughly

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first three and a half of centuries the Greater Occultation (329/941-the end of the 7th/13th century). It is hoped that by adopting this focus, this dissertation can fill several gaps in our understanding of the topic while presenting new research on an underappreciated aspect and critical phase of Shi'i intellectual history and piety.

The first two chapters of this work offer a comprehensive textual study of the early hadith corpus on the question of seeing the Hidden Imam. Chapter 1 will serve as a background. Here we will examine the earliest extant Shi'i sources dealing with the ghayba of the final Imam from the period that is known as the Lesser Occultation. This period has been closely studied by scholars. However, this chapter will first attempt to fill a glaring gap by isolating and analyzing the few references to the ghayba in the earliest surviving tafsir and hadith works. We will consider what these sources have to say (or not say) on the issue of seeing the Hidden Imam and speculate on what they imply about the nascent Shi'i community of the time. As we will see, the overwhelming majority of hadiths affirm that the Imam cannot be seen or recognized by anyone during the ghayba, while a small number suggest that he can be seen though not recognized.

68 See Note 12 above.
Considering the authority invested in hadith literature\(^{69}\) and in light of the fact that the majority of Traditions affirm that the Imam cannot be seen during his absence, a question emerges: on what scriptural basis do Shi‘i scholars transmit the accounts of those who have seen and spoken with him during the Greater Occultation? Chapter 2 will focus on three specific hadiths that are cited by some later scholars as leaving open the possibility of a special cadre of believers to encounter (and recognize) the Imam during this second ghayba. We will gloss key words found in these hadiths and contextualize them.

Chapter 3 is in many ways the heart and soul of this dissertation. Here, we will focus on the critical first century of the Greater Occultation. The central argument advanced is that there was a noticeable shift between the Traditionists who wrote in the early years of the Greater Occultation and the rationalist-oriented scholars who followed them vis-à-vis the question of whether it is possible to see the Imam. The Traditionists argued that the Imam can no longer be encountered in a wakeful state by anyone. The locus classicus for proscribing the possibility of seeing him in the second ghayba was the final tawqi‘ of the Hidden Imam which we have

\(^{69}\) On Shi‘i hadith, see Kohlberg, “Shi‘i Hadith;” Ahmad, “Twelver Shi‘i hadīth;” Kazemi-Moussavi, “Hadith ii. In Shi‘ism,” Elr, 11:447-9; Brunner, “The Role of hadith as Cultural Memory in Shi‘i History.” For important insights on the function of hadith as both narrative fiction and religious text, see Günther, “Fictional Narration and Imagination within an Authoritative Framework: Towards a New Understanding of Hadith.”
referred to above. We will come to see that the rationalist scholars, slowly if cautiously, accede to the possibility of encountering the Imam although they abstain from mentioning anyone who has in actuality met him. These findings challenge some of the conclusions of earlier scholars who have tended to assume that stories of encounters with the Imam in a wakeful state have appeared since the beginning of the Greater Occultation.

Finally, in chapter 4, we will examine the earliest accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam. The tacit approval of the rationalists discussed in chapter 3 for the possibility of seeing the Imam served as the nucleus of yet another critical shift: In the following two centuries, accounts of encounters and contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, albeit rare and infrequent, begin to appear in the works of Shi‘i authorities. At the conclusion of this chapter, we will see that while the accounts remain few in number and consistent in their representation of the Hidden Imam in the next centuries, they begin to increase in the Safavid period and become far more embellished. This development is linked to a critical gloss of the final *tawqīʿ* which set the hermeneutic stage for the exponential proliferation of these accounts in the modern period and has been cited by numerous scholars to justify the stories of encounters with the Imam.
Our study is accompanied by an appendix, a preliminary descriptive catalogue of the main collections of encounters narratives or other works that emphasize such stories found in Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭihrāni’s *al-Dhari‘a ilā tašānif al-shi‘a*. 
CHAPTER 1

The Unknown, the Unseen, and the Unrecognized

In this chapter, we will examine the earliest extant Shi‘ī sources from the period that is known as the Lesser Occultation for what they can tell us about the ghayba of the twelfth and final Imam and in particular, the question of contacting and seeing this figure. We will consider here the earliest surviving hadith compilations and tafsīr works.

1.1. The Hadith Compilations of al-Barqī and al-Ṣaffār al-Qummi

At the outset, it must be said that the two earliest surviving Shi‘ī hadith collections, both compiled by scholars who lived during the early years of the occultation of the twelfth Imam, are decidedly un-messianic. There are no references to the ghayba in Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Barqī’s (d. 274/887 or 280/893) Kitāb al-maḥāsin,70 a point to which Kohlberg first brought attention in his seminal 1976 study, or in al-Ṣaffār al-Qummi’s (d. 290/902-3) Baṣāʾir al-darajāt.71 Amir-Moezzi found it “plus complexe et plus troublant” that the latter contains


only five hadiths (out of 1,881) that number the Imams at twelve, but his observation further supports the point that most Shi'a knew nothing about the twelfth Imam or that he even existed during the crisis that erupted after the death of the eleventh Imam, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/874), a period of mass confusion that is simply called al-ḥayra. Perhaps even more surprising is that none of the five hadiths that Amir-Moezzi has isolated hints at the notion of ghayba or suggests that the twelfth Imam is the messianic Mahdī or Qāʾim.

However, in the 22nd chapter of Baṣāʾīr al-darajāt, entitled, “The Messenger of God bequeathed the supreme name [of God] (al-ism al-akbar), the heritage of prophecy and the heritage of [all] knowledge to ʿAlī before he died,” we find two intriguing hadiths that have escaped scholars. Both hadiths speak openly about the appearance of a prophet (nabi) after

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73 On him, see Halm, “ʿAskari, Ḥasan b. ʿAlī” Elr, 2:769.

74 Al-Khazzāz, Kifāyat al-athar fī al-naṣṣ ʿalā al-aʾimmah al-ithnī ʿashar, 193. Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿArab, 4:222, aptly defines ḥayra as the state of being lost or unable to find one’s way, thus the antonym of ihtidāʾ. Cf. Qur’an 6:71, the only verse where a derivate of the ḥaʾ-ʾyāʾ-ʾrāʾ root (namely, ḥayrān) is found.

75 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, Baṣāʾīr al-darajāt, 280 (no. 15), a hadith of the Prophet commanding Abū Bakr to believe in ʿAlī and eleven of his descendants who the Prophet says “are like me except that they are
Muḥammad and the line of Imams. The first of the two is transmitted by the sixth Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) and is in fact a ḥadīth qudsī (Divine Saying; lit., sacred or holy hadith) in that the words are spoken by God: “I never leave the earth bereft of a wali [here, meaning an Imam] who possesses knowledge, by whom My obedience and my walāya are made known, a Proof [again, an Imam] who will exist between the passing of the Prophet until the appearance of the next prophet” (bayna qabḍ al-nabī ilā khurūj al-nabī al-ākhar). The second hadith, the fourth and final Tradition found in the same chapter, is similar, only here the words are attributed to the angel Gabriel and the definite article is excised from the word nabī to make the meaning more generic: “...between the passing of a prophet and the appearance of another (prophet)” (bayna qabḍ nabī ilā khurūj akhār). Both hadiths, and in particular the first, imply not prophets” (mithlī illā al-nubuwwa), 319-20 (nos. 2,4,5), and 372 (no. 16), where all twelve Imams are called Mahdīs; Amir-Moezzi, “al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī et son Kitāb Baṣāʾir al-darajāt,” 240 (note 48).

76 On him, see Multiple Authors, “Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq,” EIr, 14:349-66.

77 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, Baṣāʾir al-darajāt, 468-70 (nos. 1,4). On the term, “proof [of God]” (ḥujjat) as a designation of all of the Imams and in particular an epithet of the twelfth Imam in early Shiʿi sources, see Dakake, “Ḥojjat,” EIr, 12:424-6.; Amir-Moezzi, The Divine Guide, index, s.v. ‘ḥujja, ḥujaj (proof).’ On the class of hadiths known as ḥadīth qudsī in Sunnī sources, see Robson, “Ḥadīth Kudsi,” EI², 8:28-9; Algar, “Hadith iv. In Sufism,” EIr, 11:451-3, who discusses the particular interest shown to such hadiths in Sūfī literature; Graham, Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam. Graham devotes a few paragraphs to discussing the presence of aḥādīth qudsiyya in the later Shiʿi hadith collection of al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693) – which itself is of course a systematic compilation of hadiths found in earlier Shiʿi works – while admitting that a study of aḥādīth qudsiyya in Shiʿi hadith collections is outside the scope of his monograph and merits a separate survey (which still remains a desideratum),
that after Muḥammad, an Imam will always be present until the next prophet is raised by God. As is the case with all other hadiths found in Baṣāʾir al-darajāt, these Traditions do not mention or even hint that any of the Imams who will exist until the appearance of the next prophet will become concealed. Furthermore, if by the next prophet is meant the Qāʾim, who according to other Shiʿi hadiths, will introduce a new amr, a new Book, a new sovereignty

Graham, Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam, 67-8. In some Shiʿi sources, this body of hadith is called “the hadiths of God” (akhbār Allāh), e.g., al-Majlisi, Bihār al-anwār, 51:65.

Cf. a hadith found elsewhere in Baṣāʾir al-darajāt and Kitāb al-maḥāsin that there will always be a Proof (i.e., an Imam) on earth until forty days before the Day of Resurrection: “By God, the earth will continue to have a Proof (ḥujja) [i.e., an Imam] who knows what is permissible (ḥalāḥ) and what is prohibited (ḥarām) and who will call [people] to the Way of God [cf. Q 16:125]. The Proof will never be cut off from the earth except for [the last] forty days prior to the day of resurrection,” al-Barqī, Kitāb al-maḥāsin, 236; al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, Baṣāʾir al-darajāt, 484.

It is often difficult to translate the term amr (lit., command, order, cause, affair) owing to its multifarious uses. Amr in hadiths about the Qāʾim has clear eschatological and apocalyptic connotations. In certain hadiths, the Qur’anic amr is the Qāʾim. The opening verse of Qur’an 16 is interpreted by al-Ṣādiq as being “our amr, meaning the rise of our qāʾim (huwa anrunū yaʾni qiyām al-qāʾim), (the one who will rise from) the family of Muḥammad,” al-Najafi, Taʾwīl al-āyāt, 1:252; al-ʿĀmilī al-Isfahānī, Muqaddimat tafsīr mirʻāt al-anwār, 73; al-Raḍāwī, al-Mahdī l-mawʿūd, 137; cf. Majlisi, Kitāb-i rajʿat, 173. The little-known Safavid exegete, Bahāʾ al-Din Muḥammad al-Lāhījī (fl. 11th/17th cent.), Tafsīr-i Sharīf Lāhījī, 2:694, based on this and other hadiths, avers that what is meant by (murād) amr Allāh throughout the Qurʾan is the Qāʾim. In a related hadith, one of al-Bāqir’s disciples says, “I asked (al-Bāqir) about this amr, when will he appear?” (saʿaltu abā Jaʿfar ʿan al-amr māta yakūn?). He answered, “When you expect that he will come from one direction [or in one manner] and he appears from a [different] direction [or in a different manner], do not reject him!” (in kuntum tuʿammīlān an yajīʿakum min wajhīna thumma jāʾakum min wajhīna ḥa-lā tunkirūnahu), Ibn Bābūya, al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayrah, 94; al-Majlisi, Bihār al-anwār, 52:268 (no. 157). According to a more frequently cited hadith
ascribed to al-Ṣādiq, the Qā’im will appear with an entirely new amr (jā’a bi-amr, ghayr alladhī kān), al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 1:536 (no. 2). A slightly different variation of this hadith is found in al-Sayyārī, Kitāb al-qirā’āt, 106. A different hadith also attributed to al-Ṣādiq states that the Qā’im will call people to islām anew, while guiding them to a forgotten amr from which the people have strayed (wa-hadāhum ilā amr, qad duthira fa-ḍalla ‘anhu al-jumhūr), al-Mufid, al-Irshād, 2:383. Other hadiths appear to equate amr with din (= religion, but also belief in the unity of God, pious fear of God, a custom, habit, way, mode, manner of conduct, or the like, see Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1:944). Al-Mufid, for example, in a passage excerpted by his student al-Murtaḍā, refers to a hadith saying that the Qā’im has been so-called “because he will rise with a religion that has been effaced (yaqūm bi-dīn, qad indarasa), manifest a truth that was hidden (yuẓhir bi-ḥaqq, kāna makhfiyy), and fearlessly rise through the power of Truth/God,” quoted in al-Murtaḍā/al-Mufid, al-Fusūl al-mukhtāra, 322. Moreover, the first part of Qur’an 5:64, {The Jews said, ‘The hand of God is chained up.’}, is interpreted by al-Riḍā as, “(the Jews) meant that God has brought the amr to an end and will not bring forth a new (amr) again.” (ya’nūna anna Allāh taʿālā qad farag ha min al-amr fa-laysa yuḥdith shay’),” al-Ṣadūq, ‘Uyūn akhbār, 1:182 > al-Kāshānī, Tafsīr al-ṣāfī, 2:50; al-Ḥuwayzī, Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn, 1:649. In other words, the Jews believed that the amr of God brought by Moses to them was the only amr and that God would never raise a prophet with a new amr again. Lawson’s translation of amr as “the divine cause” (Lawson, “Interpretation as Revelation,” 250) would be my preferred choice in translating these hadiths, though some other translations offered by scholars are also useful. Cook, for example, suggests translating amr in messianic and apocalyptic Shīʿī hadiths as “the End,” “a new revelation or messianic system of government,” or “revelation, period or dispensation,” Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 195, 199, 232-3. Clarke translates amr jadīd in a Shiʿī hadith about the Qāʾim as “a new rule (amr, political order),” Clarke, “The Rise and Decline of Taqīyya in Twelver Shiʿism,” 50. Similarly, Amir-Moezzi renders amr jadīd as “a new order,” Amir-Moezzi, “Eschatology iii. In Imami Shiʿism,” Elr, 8:577. The term was also used by the early Fatimids, especially as part of a locution commonly found in proto-Twelver and Twelver sources, sāhib (master, lord, possessor) al-amr. See Halm, The Empire of the Mahdi, 69, 76 See also Baljon, “The ‘Amr of God’ in the Koran;” Momen, “A Study of the Meaning of the Word ‘al-Amr’;” an interesting usage noticed in “‘A Booth Like the Booth of Moses…’ A Study of an Early Hadith,” and the related interpretation of amr in Sunnī works of kālām as a particular revelation of God’s will and the providential rule of creation through His command and decrees, Schwarb, “Amr,” EI³ (online edition).
(sultān), a new Sunnah, and new laws (ahkām) – which according to Amir-Moezzi, “seems to indicate a new religion abrogating Islam”80 – these two hadiths appear to support a notion about the Qāʾīm implied throughout Imāmī Shiʿī works and spoken of directly in Ismāʿīlī sources: the Qāʾīm is prophet-like, if not a prophet himself.81

1.2. The Exegetical Corpus: The tafsīr of al-ʿAskarī, al-Sayyārī, al-Fūrat, al-Qummī and al-ʿAyyāshī

80 Amir-Moezzi, “Eschatology iii. In Imami Shiʿism,” EIr, 8:577. Cf. The comment by Amanat, “Islam in Iran v. Messianic Islam in Iran: A General Survey,” 14:131, based presumably on the same hadiths: “(The Mahdī) is the divine agency that brings the old revelatory cycle to its ultimate totality and potentially stands to start a new religious dispensation (even though the latter aspect is often passed over in silence in the Shiʿite literature).” We assume that by “Shiʿite literature,” Amanat has in mind mostly modern and contemporary works, i.e. works produced in post-Bābī/Bahāʾī Shiʿī Islam. Henry Corbin, “Youthfulness and Chivalry,” 71 (For original French, see Corbin, L’homme et son ange, 231-2), read the same hadiths differently: “. . . the Parousia of the Twelfth Imām, is not that the Twelfth Imām must bring a new Book, a new sharīʿat. T That would not at all be the advent of taʾwīl; a new Law would not at all mark the advent of the esoteric. Not at all—what the Twelfth Imām brings is the revelation of the hidden meaning of all the revelations.” Kohlberg, “Authoritative Scriptures,” 310-11, expresses a similar opinion: “In some eschatological traditions [= hadiths] it is stated that the Mahdī will bring with him a new order and a new book (or revelation) (amr jadīd wa kitāb jadīd). The amr jadīd is not to be understood to mean that he will usher in a new religion… Similarly, the kitāb jadīd is probably not a previously unknown text but one or more texts that had been the preserve of the Imam.”

81 This interpretation was advanced by Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 226 and 201-2, based on his study of Twelver (though not Ismāʿīlī) hadith compilations: “in Shiʿī traditions the only available explanation of the constant comparison with prophets is that the Mahdī himself is either at the level of a prophet (which depends largely on how the word amr is translated), or just slightly below it.” For a comparison with 4th/10th century Ismāʿīlī sources, see Ghaemmaghami, “{And the Earth will Shine with the Light of its Lord} (Q 39:69): qāʾīm and qiyāma in Shiʿī Islam.”
While the three hadiths compilations (namely, al-Qummi’s *Basa'ir al-darajat*, al-Barqi’s *Kitāb al-mahāsin*, and the slightly later al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī* (on which, see below)) and the two Shi‘ī heresiographical works of al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. between 300/912-3 and 310/922-3),82 author of *Kitāb fīraṣ al-Shī‘a*, and Sa‘d b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ash‘arī al-Qummi (d. 299/911-2 or 301/913-4),83 author of *Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-fīraq*, that have survived from the period that came to be called the Lesser Occultation have been mined by scholars for their few references to the twelfth Imam and the notion of ghayba, the same cannot be said about the earliest surviving Shi‘ī Qur’an commentaries, all of which likewise date from the Lesser Occultation, or just before. In order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of what light the earliest sources shed about the Imam’s ghayba in general and the question of contact with the Hidden Imam in particular, it is imperative to consider these sources as well.

Out of the 379 hadiths that make up the *tafsīr* of the first two suras of the Qur’an ascribed to Imam Ḥasan al-ʿAskari, only one mentions the ghayba of the Qāʾim, a hadith


83 See Kohlberg, “Early Attestations of the Term “Ithnā ʿAshariyya,” 343. For a comparison of these two heresiographical texts, see Madelung “Bemerkungen zur imamitischen Fīraq-Literature,” 37-52.
narrated on the authority of al-ʿAskarī’s father, the tenth Imam, ʿAlī al-Hādī (d. 254/868):84

“Were it not for the ulama who will live after the ghayba of your Qāʾim, invite [people] to [his cause], guide [them] to him, defend his dīn with the proofs of God, save the weak (ḍuʿafāʾ) among God’s servants from the temptations of Iblis and his evil spirits (cf. Qur’an 37:7) and the snares of those who are hostile towards the Shiʿa (al-nawāṣib), every person would renounce the faith of God...”85 Bar-Asher has demonstrated from internal evidence that the tafsīr ascribed to al-ʿAskarī was likely composed during his lifetime though he is not prepared to attribute the work directly to the Imam himself.86 The question of provenance aside, the fact that only one hadith out of 379 mentions the ghayba amounts to a near complete silence on the issue and it is entirely possible that the above hadith or at least the phrase, “the ghayba of your

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85 Al-ʿAskarī, al-Tafsīr al-mansūb, 344-5 (no. 225) > al-Bahrānī, al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 5:319-20. Cf. al-Majlisī, Bihār al-anwār, 2:6 (no. 12), who tries to quietly change the oddly sounding “your Qāʾim” (which would be a strange thing for an Imam to say) to “our Qāʾim.” Hadiths of this type that divide the Shiʿa into two distinct categories (ulama and ḍuʿafāʾ) are common in the tafsīr attributed to al-ʿAskarī. See Kohlberg, “Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period,” 41-3.

86 Bar-Asher, “The Qurʾān Commentary Ascribed to Imam Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī,” 379. Cf. the formidable study by al-Tustari (which unfortunately Bar-Asher does not mention or engage) who contests vehemently that any attempt to attribute this tafsīr to al-ʿAskari amounts to slander (buḥtān) while arguing that many of hadiths found in this work are fabricated, al-Tustari, al-Akhbār al-dakhila, 152-228. See also Luṭfī, “Tafsīr-i Imām Ḥasan ʿAskarī,” DMBI (online edition).
Qāʾim,” was added to the work during or after the period that came to be known as the Lesser Occultation.

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī’s (fl. 3th/9th cent) recently published work on variant readings of the Qur’an, known as Kitāb al-tanzil wa-l-tahrīf or simply al-Tafsīr, contains numerous references to the Qāʾim (though not to the Mahdī) but surprisingly, never mentions or even hints at the notion of ghayba or the issue of contact with the Hidden Imam. Interestingly, later sources attribute a report to al-Sayyārī in which he transmits an account of a

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87 Amir-Moezzi and Kohlberg state on more than occasion in the introduction and notes (al-Sayyārī, Revelation and Falsification, 40, 92-3) that the terms Qāʾim and ṣāḥib hādhā al-amr refer to the Mahdī, giving the impression that the title al-Mahdī (with messianic connotations) is used by al-Sayyārī in speaking about the Qāʾim. However, such is not the case. The absence in al-Sayyārī’s work of any mention of the title al-Mahdī (again, with messianic connotations) further supports Sachedina’s thesis that “at least at the beginning of the Imamite history, which should be placed at the end of third/ninth and the beginning of the fourth/tenth century,…no idea about (the twelfth Imam) being al-Mahdī, the eschatological savior of Islam, had yet been accentuated.” Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 59. Sachedina’s argument was criticized by Hussain, The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, 147, who cited a Tradition from al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī that identifies the twelfth Imam as the Mahdī, though to be fair, al-Kulaynī’s work is dated slightly later than the period Sachedina is discussing here. Since the bulk of the sources used for this dissertation are from the period after al-Kulaynī when the appellations Mahdī and Qāʾim are used interchangeably, they will likewise be used interchangeably in this work. On the term Qāʾim, see also Madelung, “Ḳāʾim Āl Muḥammad,” EI², 4:456-7.

88 Not surprisingly, there are also no references to the ghayba or to the twelfth Imam in the Zaydī Shīʿī tafsīr of al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥakam al-Ḥibārī (d. 286/899-900), Tafsīr al-Ḥibārī. On this work, see al-Ḥibārī, Tafsīr al-Ḥibārī, 75-216 (from the introduction by al-Jalālī); Lawson, “Exegesis vi. In Aḥbārī and Post-Safavid Esoteric Shiʿism,” Elr, 9:124; and now Amir-Moezzi, Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant. On the author, see al-Ḥibārī, Tafsīr al-Ḥibārī, 17-74 (from the introduction by al-Jalālī).
m Miracle performed by the twelfth Imam soon after he was born, perhaps in an attempt to link al-Sayyāri to the Hidden Imam and compensate for the lack of any reference in his work to the notion of ghayba.  

A similar observation can be made about the incomplete tafsīr of Furāt b. Furāt Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī (fl. late 3rd/9th cent.). While al-Kūfī cites numerous hadiths that mention the Mahdī, we find only one reference to the ghayba of the Imam: In a hadith without an isnād, the Prophet foretells the coming of “the concealed one who will appear after a lengthy ghayba (al-ghāʾib al-qādim baʿda ṭūl al-ghayba).” Al-Kūfī does not proffer any comments about the meaning of this hadith or any other hadith as his work is strictly a tafsīr bi-l-maʿṭūr or commentary based on Traditions (as opposed to a tafsīr bi-l-raʾy or commentary by opinion).

89 For the sources of this account, see Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, “Introduction,” 33.

90 On him, see Bar-Asher, “Forāt b. Ebrāhīm,” Elr, 10:82; Bar-Asher, Scripture and exegesis, 29-31; Hamza, Rizvi, with Mayer, eds., An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries, 25-6. On his tafsīr, see also Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work, 341.

91 For example, al-Kūfī, Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī, 74-5 (no. 48)

The case of the *tafsir* ascribed to ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (*fl*. 4th/10th cent.) is somewhat different. While the author of this work transmits numerous apocalyptic hadiths, including hadiths about the appearance of the Qāʾīm, we find only three references to the *ghayba*. First, under his commentary for Qur’an 28:5, Moses’s fright and concealment are interpreted as prefigurations of the Qāʾīm’s *ghayba*, escape and concealment (*ghaybatīhi wa-harabīhi wa-istīrārihi*), though according to the editor of the *tafsir*, this sentence is not found in some manuscripts and may in fact be a later addition to the text. The entire hadith is likely


95 Modarresi, *Tradition and Survival*, xvii, is of the opinion that “the *Tafsir* commonly ascribed to ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummi is not by that scholar,” though it is not clear if he is alluding here to the theory advanced by Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī that the *tafsir* was actually assembled by al-Qummi’s student, Abū al-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās, or to something else. On al-Ṭihrānī’s theory, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shiism*, 55; Hamza, Rizvi, with Mayer, eds., *An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries*, 25; Haydūs, Ḥawl *tafsir* al-Qummi: *dirāsa taḥqīqiyya*.


of Wāqifī origins, referring to al-Kāzim’s imprisonment, escape and second period of concealment (on the Wāqifīyya, see below).

The second reference to the ghayba in al-Qummī’s tafsīr is found under his commentary on Qur’an 22:45: {How many a city We have destroyed in its evil-doing, and now it is fallen down upon its turrets! How many a deserted well, a lofty palace!}. Here, {a deserted well} is interpreted as “[a well] from which one cannot draw water: This is the Imam who has vanished and from whom it is no longer possible to acquire knowledge” (hiya allati lā yustasqā minhā wa-huwa al-imām alladhi qad ghāba fa-lā yuqtabas minhu al-ʿilm). Al-Qummī contrasts this well with {a lofty palace} which is “a similitude (mathal) for the Commander of the Faithful [i.e. ʿAlī], for [all of] the Imams, and for their excellent virtues which tower above the world.”  

Curiously, al-Qummī does not identify “the Imam who has vanished” as the son of

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98 Al-Qummī, Tafsīr al-Qummī, 2:85 > al-Kāshānī, Tafsīr al-ṣāfi, 3:383; al-Baḥrānī, al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 3:893; al-Ḥuwayzi, Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn, 3:507; al-Majlisi, Biḥār al-anwār, 24:101 (no. 5). On the basis of this hadith, Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 1:93-4, lists “the deserted well” as one of the Hidden Imam’s epithets. Al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, Muqaddimat tafsīr mirʾāt al-anwār, 94, likewise interprets the well as “ʿAlī, his walāya, the Silent Imam, the Hidden Imam, Fāṭima and her children [i.e., the Imams] who have been cut off from earthly power.” Other Imāmī hadiths gloss the lofty palace as “the speaking Imam” and the deserted well as “the silent Imam,” al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, Baṣāʿir al-darājāt, 505; al-Ṣadūq, Maʿānī al-akhbār, 111 (nos. 1-2); the lofty palace as Muḥammad and the deserted well as ʿAli, Ibn Shahrāshūb, Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib, 3:88 [this interpretation is also found in the early Ismāʿīlī work, al-Yaman (attrib.), Kitāb al-kashf, 50 (on this work, see below)]; the lofty palace as ʿAli and the deserted well as Fāṭima and the other Imams on account of their having been deprived of [earthly]
al-Ḥasan b. al-ʿAskarī or any other person for that matter, perhaps because this fact was already well-known to his readers or perhaps because he himself did not know. There are also no references to the Imam’s representatives, his agents or to any of his tawqīʿāt said to have been issued by the Imam at al-Qummi’s time as cited in later works (see chapter 3). Significantly, al-Qummi states that now that the Imam is in ghayba, there is no way to receive knowledge (al-ʿilm) of a religious (or non-religious) character from him. Presumably, the ghayba of ʿilm is what has made it necessary for him to produce a written commentary on the Qur’an, something that was not needed when the Imam was present and his ʿilm was accessible.

The third and final reference to ghayba in al-Qummi’s tafsīr is similar to the previous hadith and is found under his comments on Qur’an 67:30: {Say: ‘What think you? If in the morning your water should have vanished into the earth, then who would bring you running water?’}. Here, al-Qummi quotes the words of an unnamed Imam about this verse: “What think you? If your Imam vanishes from you, who can bring you an Imam like him?” (in ʿasbaḥa imāmukum ghāʾibm fa-man yaʾtikum bi-imām in mithlihi).99 This hadith is reiterated in al-

99 Al-Qummi, Tafsīr al-Qummi, 2:379; al-Majlisi, Biḥār al-anwār, 51:50 (no. 21); al-Nili, Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍīʿa, 37-8
Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī*, al-Nuʿmānī’s *Ghayba*, and al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn*. The version found in *Kamāl al-dīn* is ascribed to the sixth Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/732, 117/735 or 118/736), and narrated on the authority of ʿAli b. Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭāʾīnī, showing that it is likely of *Wāqifī* origin (on al-Baṭāʾīnī and the *Wāqifīyya*, see below): “This verse has been revealed about the Qāʾīm (*nazalat fī al-qāʾīm*). When your Imam vanishes from you, you will not know where he is. Who then will bring you an unconcealed (*ẓāhir*) Imam?” In other words, if the Imam, who is analogous to water – the source of all life on earth – disappears, God alone can cause him to appear again. What of course immediately stands out is the fact that the vanished Imam and the manifest Imam appear to be two different figures, suggesting that the hadith originated with the one of the *Wāqifī* groups that believed the Imam had died and would be resurrected in the future as the Qāʾīm. This belief is represented in several early Shiʿī hadiths that are either excised or explained away in later works, perhaps the most significant of which is a curious hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq stating that the Qāʾīm will only appear after an interval or break in the series of Imams (*ʿalā fatrat in min al-aʾīmma*), i.e., after a period of time

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when there are no Imams, just as the Prophet was raised after a break in the sequence of
Messengers (kaṃa anna rasūl Allāh buʿitha ′alā fātrat, min al-rusul; cf. Qurʾan 5:19).102

102 Al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 1:341 (no. 21); al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 193. A different hadith with the same
purport (i.e., that there will be a fatra or break in the Imamate) is categorically rejected in al-Ṣadūq,
Kamāl al-dīn, 596. See also al-Shahristānī (d. 548/1153-4), al-Milal wa-l-nihal, 1:171, who in
describing the various Shiʿī sects that split after Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī based on earlier sources at his disposal
states that the eighth sect maintained: 1. al-ʿAskarī died without issue; 2. those who claimed he had a
surviving son were lying and deceitful; 3. it is possible for God to remove (yarfaʿ: lit., to raise; cf.
Qurʾan 4:158) the Proof (i.e., the Imam) from the earth when the people are transgressing the sacred law
(li-maʿāṣīhim); 4. that the earth today is bereft of an Imam just as there was no prophet in the world in
the interval between the previous prophet (i.e., Jesus) and the rise of Muḥammad (wa-l-arḍ al-yawm bi-
lā ḥujja ka-mā kāna al-fatra qabl mabʿath al-nabī). Cf. the description of the 14th sect of the factions
that split after al-ʿAskarī in al-ʿArabī al-Qummi, (d. 299/911-2 or 301/913-4), Kitāb al-maqālāt wa-l-
fiqaq, 114-5; the 8th sect in al-Nawbakhtī (d. between 300/912-3 and 310/922-3), Kitāb fiqaq al-Shīʿa,
85-6 [= al-Nawbakhtī, Shīʿa Sects (trans. Kadhim), 159]; and the 9th sect in al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān (d.
363/974), Sharḥ al-akhbār, 3:313-5, who believed that al-ʿAskarī did not have a surviving son; that after
his death, the community entered a period when there are no Imams on earth (al-arḍ al-yawm bi-
ghayr ḥujja) just as there were no prophets in the period before the appearance of Muḥammad. Cf.
also the highly original interpretation found in the early Ismāʿīlī text attributed to Jaʿfar b. Mansūr al-Yaman
(attrib.), Kitāb al-kashf, 79, where ghayba is interpreted as the interregnum between two speaker-
prophets (hiya al-fatra allātī takūn bayna al-nāṭiq wa-l-nāṭiq) [the Kitāb al-kashf is a compilation of six
pre-Fatimid Ismāʿīlī treatises on the interpretation of the Qurʾan. See Madelung, “Das Imamat,” 52-8;
Daftary, Ismaili Literature; 122]. Cf. also Ibn al-ʿArabī’s (d. 638/1240) intriguing statement that the
Mahdi will appear after a long break in din (yakhruj ʿalā fatra, min al-dīn), Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Futūḥāt al-
Makkiyya, 3:327. The meaning of this statement by Ibn al-ʿArabī is unclear but it may be related to the
sentence that immediately follows, that God will lay down through the Mahdi what has not been laid
down in the Qurʾan. This passage is cited by Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385) in at least two of his
works: Jāmiʿ al-asrār wa-manbaʿ al-anwār, 441, and al-Muqaddamāt min kitāb naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ
fuṣūṣ al-hikam, 236; by Mullā Ṣadrā in his Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī, 1:560, as well as by Ṣadrāʾs student al-
Fayḍ al-Kāshānī in his hadith compendium, al-Wāʿfī, 2:470, though none of these scholars adds his own
comments to the passage. The statement is not included in the sections of the al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya
that have been translated into English and I am not aware of any commentaries on it in western sources.
Before concluding our discussion of the Qāʾim in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it would be appropriate to discuss the famous hadith of al-Khaḍîr/al-Khaḍîr\(^{103}\) which is recorded in this work and has received significant attention from western scholars. In an older version of this hadith found in al-Barqī’s *Kitāb al-mahāsin*, ʿAlī (d. 40/661), his son al-Ḥasan (d. 50/670)\(^{104}\) and the Prophet’s companion, Salmān al-Fārsī (d. 35/655-6 or 36/656-7)\(^{105}\) were one day greeted inside a mosque by a mysterious stranger dressed in silk and later identified by ʿAlī as “my brother, al-Khaḍîr.” The stranger posed a number of questions to ʿAlī who deflected them to al-Ḥasan, testing his prowess. Fully satisfied with the responses he received, the stranger turned to ʿAlī and bore witness that he was the Prophet’s successor (*waṣī*), that Hasan would in turn succeed

\(^{103}\) Al-Qummi, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:44-5. Al-Khaḍîr/al-Khaḍîr (“the green man”) is the name given to the legendary figure of Islamic lore commonly associated with the anonymous servant of God and spiritual guide who accompanied Moses and his companion (Qur’an 18:59-81). See Krasnowolska, “Ḵežr,” *EIr* (online edition); Renard, “Khaḍîr/Khîḍr,” *EQ*, 3:81-4; A.J. Wensinck “al-Khaḍîr (al-Khîḍr),” *EI²*, 4:902-5; and especially, Franke, *Begegnung mit Khidr*. In Shiʿī works written to prove the ghayba of the Hidden Imam, stories of al-Khaḍîr are often adduced as accounts of another holy figure whose life has been miraculously prolonged by God and who is in a perpetual state of (physical) concealment. For an analysis of narrative stories about al-Khîḍr that were incorporated into the earliest surviving ghayba works, see Yoshida, “Qiṣṣa Contribution to the Theory of Ghaybah in Twelver Shiʿism,” 91-104. See also Markwith, “The Eliatic Function in the Islamic Tradition: Khîḍr and the Mahdī,” esp. 62-74; Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel*, 122; Corbin, “Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality,” 390; and Brown, *The Challenge of Islam*, 113, who astutely observes, following Corbin, that the Shiʿī institution of the Imamate is in some ways “an attempt to institutionalize the spirit of Khidr.”


him followed by the other Imams “until he came to the last of them” (ḥatta atāʿalā ākhirihim). Kohlberg, Amir-Moezzi and Newman have all written that this hadith as found in al-Qummi’s *tafsīr* is significant for being the earliest text in which the names of all twelve Imams are mentioned. However, this is not exactly correct. The hadith, as found in al-Qummi’s *tafsīr* neither mentions the name of the twelfth Imam nor suggests that he will have a *ghayba*. It does not even state explicitly that the Qāʾīm is the son of the eleventh Imam. The precise wording is that the successor (*waṣī*) of al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (al-ʿAskarī) is the eagerly awaited (*al-muntaẓar*) Qāʾīm who will fill the world with justice and equity. The name of the twelfth Imam is nowhere mentioned in this hadith or in any of the extant sources that precede al-Kulaynī.

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107 Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʾashariyya,” 523 (note 2); Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, 260 (note 566) [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 216: “The first text of certain authenticity that we presently [＝ currently] possess where the names of the twelve imams are listed is the *Tafsīr* written by ʿAlî b. Ibrâhîm al-Qummî (d. 307/919)”]; cf. a more recent article, Amir-Moezzi, “Islam in Iran VII. The Concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shiʿism,” *EI*, 14:137, where it seems he has attempted to modulate his earlier statement: “The oldest text of certain authenticity that we have, in which a complete list of the twelve Imams is found, seems to be the *Tafsīr* by ʿAlî b. Ebrāhîm Qomi.” (notice that he omits saying that the *names* of the Imams are listed as he did in the earlier work)]; Newman, *Formative Period*, 85. Cf. Amir Arjomand, “Imam Absconditus and the Beginnings of a Theology of Occultation,” 11 (note 83).

Finally, in Abū al-Naḍr Muḥammad al-ʿAyyāshī’s (fl. late 3rd/9th – early 4th/10th cent.) tafsīr, which is extant for the first eighteen suras of the Qur’an, we find only two references to the ghayba. The first is in a hadith ascribed to ʿAlī about the Quranic figure Dhū al-Qarnayn. After recounting that Dhū al-Qarnayn concealed himself from his people before returning to them, ʿAlī declares, “and in your midst is one like him” (wa-fīkum mithluhu).

The phrase may have been understood as a proleptic reference to the ghayba since Imāmī sources adduce the concealment of Dhū al-Qarnayn as a prophetic precedent of the ghayba of the Qāʾim. It is more likely to have been understood as a reference to ʿAlī himself as later Shiʿī (both Imāmī and Ismāʿīli) texts identify Dhū al-Qarnayn as ʿAlī.


110 As pointed out by Hamza, Rizvi, with Mayer, eds., An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries, 27, his comments on later verses are found in subsequent Shiʿī exegetical works.

111 Al-ʿAyyāshī, Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī, 2:339; al-Bahrānī, al-Burḥān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 3:663. Al-Qummī, Tafsīr al-Qummī, 2:41, has recorded this report in his tafsīr as well and added the words yaʿnī nafsahu (meaning himself, i.e. ʿAlī) after wa-fīkum mithluhu. Cf. hadith ascribed to al-Bāqīr in al-Majlisi, Bihār al-anwār, 13:300 (no. 19).

112 See, for example, al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 357 (no. 1).

The only other reference in al-ʿAyyāshī’s *tafsīr* is found in a long hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir which identifies {the distressed one} of Qur’an 27:62 as the eagerly awaited Imam. Since this hadith deals directly with the issue of contact with the Imam, it is instructive to cite the relevant section in full:

While pointing towards to the region of *Dhū Ṭuwā,* al-Bāqir said, “The master of this *amr* will hide in one of these gorges. Two nights before he appears, the *mawlā* who is at his disposal (*al-mawlā alladhī yakūn bayna yadayhi*) will come and meet some of his followers. He will ask them, ‘How many of you are here?’ They will respond, ‘About forty.’ He will then ask, ‘What would you do if your Master appeared at this very moment?’ And they will say, ‘By God, if he asks us to move the mountains for him, we would not hesitate.’ The next night, (the *mawlā*) will return to them and say, ‘Point out ten of your leaders and the best among you.’ They will do so and he will leave with (these ten) and they will meet their master who will promise to see them the next night [to make his *khurūj/ẓuhūr*?]…

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114 *Dhū Ṭuwā* is a place (*mawḍiʿ*) near Mecca, al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 4:45. Shiʿī sources identify it as a mountain near Mecca that serves at times as the residence (*jāygāh*) of the Hidden Imam. See Muḥsin Muʿīnī, “Dhī Ṭuwā,” *DMT*, 8:73-4. Ṭuwā is an enigmatic term mentioned in the Qurʾān, denoting a place or concept of holiness. It is mentioned twice (Q 20:12, 79:16) as the name of a sacred valley where Moses encountered God. See Brinner, “Ṭuwā,” *EQ*, 5:395-6, who notes that Ṭuwā “has been defined as something ‘twice done,’ as though folded, and medieval writers have said that *ṭuwā* is ‘twice sanctified, twice blessed and twice called,’ as God calls Moses.”

This hadith is also likely of Wāqīfī origin. In a report that closely resembles the above, a believer meets the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799),\(^{116}\) and one of his servants (khādim) and is told that they have settled this year in Dhū Ṭuwā.\(^{117}\) (We will return to the significance of the mawlā mentioned in this hadith in chapter 2). The reference to gorges (shuʿāb) is likely meant to recall the story of Muḥammad concealing himself in the ravine of Shīb Abī Ṭālib outside of Mecca. Together with the time when the Prophet and Abū Bakr hid in a cave on the journey to Yathrib, this account is adduced in Shiʿī sources as proof that Muḥammad himself was forced into two ghaybas out of fear for his life.\(^{118}\)

These few references notwithstanding, the fact that the above tafsīr works are almost entirely silent on issues of messianism is peculiar, in particular in the case of al-Qummi who


\(^{117}\) This rare report is cited in al-Ṭabarī al-Shīʿī, *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, 338-340 (no. 296).

was one of al-Kulaynī’s teachers and whose name is found in the asānīd of no less than one-third of the hadiths al-Kulaynī transmits in his al-Kāfī, including most of the reports concerning the Qāʾīm and his ghayba. At least three explanations can be offered for this relative silence: 1) that the genre of *tafsīr* was not deemed appropriate for transmitting hadiths about the Qāʾīm, leaving this for the numerous works on the *ghayba* that have not survived but which are referred to in biographical and bibliographical works produced in the next century; 2) that some of the hadiths about the *ghayba* of the Qāʾīm simply did not exist or were not known and were later fabricated or discovered; 3) that the doctrine had not yet been found necessary to elaborate since the proto-Imāmī Shiʿa shared the same messianic beliefs in the Qāʾīm as other contemporary Shiʿī groups, such as the followers of Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ (d. after 286/899) who began his messianic and apocalyptic activities around the all-important year of 260/874.

1.3. *Al-Baṭāʾinī and the Wāqifiyya*

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121 A similar explanation has been advanced by Newman, *Formative Period*, 84-5, for why *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt* does not address the *ghayba* of the Imam. However, I do not wish to join him in all his conclusions.

Since all of the hadiths concerning the ghayba that will be discussed in the remaining sections of this chapter and the next chapter are likely of Wāqifī origin or explicitly transmitted on the authority of known Wāqifīs, a brief overview of this sect is in order.\footnote{124} The Wāqifīyya is an appellation originally used in rijāl and firaq works for various groups of followers of the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, who denied his death and claimed that he had escaped from prison in Baghdad (which marked his first period of concealment or ghayba) and entered into hiding (which marked his second ghayba giving rise to the idea of two ghaybas), pending his return as the Qāʾim.\footnote{125}

\footnote{123} On responses by Twelver scholars to the Qarmaṭiyya and Fatimid branches of the Ismāʿiliyya, see chapter 3 of this dissertation.


\footnote{125} Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-‘ashariyya,” 532. Cf. Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shi‘ism,” 494; Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period,” 263; and now, Amir-Moezzi, “Islam in Iran VII. The Concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shi‘ism,” \textit{EI}, 14:150: “It must be emphasized that the concept of two occultations, the first shorter than the second, originated in the beliefs of the Wāqefīs of the seventh Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓem.” At least some Wāqifīs claimed that al-Kāẓim had in fact died (though not killed) but then resurrected from the dead and entered into a second ghayba. See al-Nawbakhti, \textit{Kitāb
The key figure in this movement was Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAli b. Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭāʾinī (d. ca. 201-2/816-8), known as al-Baṭāʾinī, a Kufan mawlā of the Anṣār and a hadith transmitter from al-Ṣādiq and al-Kāẓim, whose name features prominently in the present chapter. During Mūsā al-Kāẓim’s time in Baghdad, al-Baṭāʾinī served as his agent (wakīl). He continued to transmit hadiths from al-Kāẓim but was denounced by al-Riḍā after founding the Wāqifīyya firāq al-Shīʿa, 68: “Some of them denied that he was killed. They said that he has died, that God lifted him up to Himself (cf. Qur’an 4:158) and would send him back when he rises (from the dead.).”

and serving as one of the group’s leaders (aḥad ʿumad al-wāqifā) after the death of al-Kāẓim. As observed by Modarressi, he was reportedly the first to claim that al-Kāẓim had not died and could not die because he was the promised Qāʾim. He thus openly opposed ʿAlī al-Riḍā’s (d. 203/818) claim to the succession of the Imamate. According to Imāmī sources, as the financial agent of Mūsā al-Kāẓim, he and another agent of the Imam in Kūfa had a large sum of money (30,000 dinār according to a report mentioned by Ibn Bābūya) in their possession when al-Kāẓim died. Rather than hand over these funds to al-Riḍā, they kept them and maintained that al-Kāẓim had in fact not died but was simply in hiding. The fact that al-Kāẓim’s body

127 By contrast, those who affirmed al-Kāẓim’s death are referred to as Qaṭʿiyya (those who affirmed (qataʿū ʿalā) the physical death of al-Kāẓim) in the Shiʿī heresiographical works of al-Nawbakhtī and al-Ashʿāri al-Qummī.

128 Ibn Bābūya, al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra', 75 (no. 66).


130 In a remarkable hadith cited by al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 1:380 (no. 1), Abū Jarīr al-Qummī (on him, see al-Sayyārī, Revelation and Falsification, 74 (note 47)), a follower of al-Kāẓim, appeared before al-Riḍā and asked if his father, al-Kāẓim, was alive or dead. Al-Riḍā answered, “I swear by God that he has died.” Al-Qummī then stated some of the Shiʿa (viz., the Wāqifīs) are claiming that al-Kāẓim will manifest the prophetic precedent of four prophets, alluding to a hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq in various forms stating in part that like Joseph, the Qāʾim would be concealed. Al-Riḍā again responded, “I swear by God besides whom there is no other God, (al-Kāẓim) has perished (halaka)!” Al-Qummī then asked, “Has he perished in the sense that he is now hiding or has he perished in the sense that he is dead?” (halāk a ghaybat aw halāk mawt). Al-Riḍā answered, “He has perished in the sense of having died.” Al-Qummī then asked, “Are you practicing taqiyya with me?” Al-Riḍā
was hung over a bridge in Baghdad by the Abbasid Caliph for public display\textsuperscript{131} did not prevent \textit{Wāqīfīs} (lit. those who stop or put an end to [the imamate with al-Kāẓim]) from refusing to deliver the \textit{khums} (a tax intended for pious purposes and a significant source of income to be administered by the Imam) paid by al-Kāẓim’s followers to al-Riḍā. As Madelung observed, “Many, perhaps the majority, of the Kufan Imāmī transmitters in the third/ninth century belonged to this sect.”\textsuperscript{132} Later \textit{rijāl} works identify al-Baṭā’īnī and several other hadith transmitters as \textit{Wāqīfīs} in a clear attempt to discredit them as untrustworthy transmitters of hadith though, as we will see, this did not prevent the authors of the \textit{ghayba} works from absorbing hadiths transmitted on their authority about the Qāʾim and his \textit{ghayba}. We will return to the \textit{Wāqifiyya} in the pages to come.

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\textsuperscript{132} Madelung, \textit{Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran}, 80.
1.4. The Hadith Compilation of al-Kulaynī

Now that we have briefly considered the works produced before al-Kulaynī, we can turn our attention to the oldest extant work in which accounts of those who saw and recognized the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation appear: al-Kulaynī’s (d. 328/939-40) hadith compendium, al-Kāfī, widely recognized as the most important work that has survived from the period of the Lesser Occultation. Al-Kulaynī is as loud as his predecessors are quiet on the issue of the Imam’s ghayba. Throughout his work, al-Kulaynī mentions the names of several

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134 Amir Arjomand, “The Consolation of Theology,” 551. Al-Kāshānī, al-Wāfi, 1:5, for example, praised al-Kāfī as “the most trustworthy and most complete” (awthaqāhā wa-atāmmahā) of the four main Shi‘i hadith collections. Authors of numerous Shi‘i hagiographies have alleged that not only was al-Kulaynī in contact with the Hidden Imam but that his al-Kāfī was approved by the Imam, attributing an oft-cited saying to the Imam: “Al-Kāfī suffices our Shi‘a” (al-kāfī kāf in li-shī‘atinā). See Ibrāhimzādah, “Thiqat al-Islam Kulaynī: Āftāb-i ḥadīth,” 21. However, there is no historical evidence to support this clearly apocryphal claim. I have not found the above saying attributed to the Hidden Imam in any pre-modern work or collection of the Imam’s tawqī‘āt. The only passage that resembles it in a pre-modern text is al-Majlisi (Senior)’s words: “Al-Kafī is sufficient for knowing the Imams (al-kāfī kāf in ma’rifat al-a’immā),” al-Majlisi, Rawdat al-muttaqīn, 13:262, but this is not attributed as a saying to the Hidden Imam. More importantly, neither al-Kulaynī nor any of students ever alludes to an encounter with the Hidden Imam; indeed, al-Kulaynī’s decision to spend twenty years of his life producing a voluminous compilation of over 16,000 Imāmi hadiths meant to serve as an authoritative guide on theology and fiqh was itself inspired by the fact that the Imam was no longer accessible to the majority of the Shi‘a.
individuals who have served as the Imam’s agents (wukalā’) in different regions from Yemen to Nishāpūr, collecting the khumṣ and zakāt taxes from believers and carrying messages to and from the Imam. ¹³⁵ In a chapter called, “the names of those who saw (the twelfth Imam),”¹³⁶ al-Kulaynī transmits 15 separate reports (all but one from a single transmitter) of believers who saw the Imam as an infant in Samarrā’ or as a youth in Mecca or between Mecca and Medina. Most of these reports are brief, unembellished and straightforward: so and so reported that he saw the twelfth Imam as a boy during the lifetime of his father, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, or so and so reported that he saw him as a child or youth in Mecca. The fifteenth and final report in this chapter is noticeably different from those that precede it, in that (1) it contain a clear narrative structure and (2) the isnād reverts to an anonymous source, namely, one of the residents of al-Madāʾin (baʿḍ ahl al-madāʾin).¹³⁷ Since this account is representative of stories of encounters

¹³⁵ See Newman, Formative Period, 151. At this time, during the Lesser Occultation, some individuals are said to have “corresponded with the (Hidden Imam) and asked him questions concerning various aspects of the sharia” (kātaba sāḥib al-amr wa-saʿalahu masāʾil fī abwāb al-shariʿa) al-Najāshī, Rijāl al-Najāshī, 354-5 (no. 949). Al-Najāshī is here referring to Muḥammad b. Ṭabd Allāh b. Jaʿfar al-Ḥimyarī, known as Abū Jaʿfar al-Qummī (fl. late 3rd/9th-early 4th/10th cent). A Kitāb al-ghayba is attributed to al-Ḥimyarī’s father, known as “Shaykh of the Qummīs,” but has not survived. See Amir-Moezzi, The Divine Guide, 216 (no. 566); Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shiʿism,” 503.

with the Hidden Imam from the Lesser Occultation found in later works, a translation is useful:

I was performing the ḥajj with one of my companions. We arrived at the halting station (al-mawqif) at the plain of ʿArafāt. Suddenly, we came upon a youth (shābb) seated (on the ground) and wearing a cloth around his waist and over one of his shoulders. He had yellow sandals on his feet...and did not show any of strains of travel. A mendicant approached us but we shooed him away. He went to the youth and begged him [for money]. (The youth) picked up something from the ground and handed it to him. The beggar prayed for him, praying fervently and for a long time. The youth then stood up and disappeared from us.

Intrigued, the narrator and his companion approach the mendicant and ask him to show them what the youth gave him. The beggar takes out a small piece of gold which they estimate to be twenty mithqāls or 3.4 ounces in weight. The two immediately realize that the youth was

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137 Al-Madāʾin (old Ctesiphon) was once a metropolis on the Tigris River that declined in importance after the founding of Baghdad. See Streck and Morony, “al-Madāʾin,” EI², and now, Morony, “Madāʾen,” EIr (online edition). According to Muḥarramī, Tārīkh-i tashayyuʿ, 181, most of the residents were Shiʿī or pro-ʿAlids during the first to third centuries of the Islamic era. 


139 That the encounter is taking place at a location where a number of events are to take place on the Day of Judgment is likely not a coincidence. See Wensinck, “Mawkiʿ,” EI², 6:874.

140 One mithqāl is equivalent to approximately 4.8 grams.
their “master” (mawlā), by whom we are to assume is meant the Hidden Imam. They search for him frantically but are unable to find him. They then ask their fellow-pilgrims from Mecca and Medina whether they know anything about this young man. They learn only that he is “a youth and a descendant of ʿAlī (shābb ʿalawī) who performs the ḥajj on foot each year.”

In his instructive study, “Contribution à la Typologie des Rencontres avec l’Imâm Caché,” Amir-Moezzi argued that such reports of sightings of and encounters with the Hidden Imam found in al-Kāfī aimed principally to prove that the eleventh Imam had a surviving son who was the expected Qāʾim. Such reports however remained atypical. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābūya (d. 329/940-1; the father of al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991)) who died near the end of the Lesser Occultation, for instance, did not cite any accounts of sightings of the Hidden Imam in his al-Imāma wa-l-tabsira min al-ḥayra, a work written as the title suggests to dissipate the confusion of believers who had fallen into uncertainty about the existence or identity of the

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141 Al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 1:332 (no. 15) > al-Kāshānī, al-Wāfī, 2:401 (no. 899); al-Bāḥrānī Tabṣirat al-walī, 64 (no. 33), 276 (114); al-Majlisi, Bihār al-anwār, 52:59-60 (no. 43) [= Majlisi, Mahdi-i mawʿūd (trans. Davānī), 799]; Majlisi, Haqq al-yaqīn, 317; Amir-Moezzi, Le Guide divin, 281; Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 114. A similar though clearly different account (unfortunately, without a source) is summarized in Sell, Ithna ʿAshariyya or The Twelve Shiʿah Imams, 55-6. For a comparison of this and similar stories with a well-known version of a hadith describing the Prophet’s encounter with God in the form of a comely youth (shābb) who wore yellow sandals, see Ghaemmaghami, “Numinous Vision, Messianic Encounters,” 51-76.

142 Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 110, 121.
twelfth Imam.\textsuperscript{143} There are also no accounts, or any mention of the Hidden Imam for that matter, in one of the other few known works to have survived from the period of the Lesser Occultation, namely, al-Ṭabarī al-Imāmī’s (\textit{fl.} early 4th/10th cent.) \textit{al-Mustarshad fī al-imāma}.\textsuperscript{144} Matters appeared to have changed rather quickly as a report cited by al-Ṣadūq (d.

\textsuperscript{143} Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 114. Ibn Bābūya is said to have been in contact with the third and fourth \textit{safir} of the Hidden Imam, Ibn Bābūya, \textit{al-Imāma wa-l-tabsira min al-ḥayra}, 38 (from the editor’s introduction). According to an account often cited in hagiographical sources, both of Ibn Bābūya’s sons were born as a result of a prayer offered by the Hidden Imam, a story meant to affirm the intercessory power of the Hidden Imam (and by extension, all members of the \textit{ahl al-bayt} at whose shrines prayers for intercession are recited), Ibn Bābūya, \textit{al-Imāma wa-l-tabsira min al-ḥayra}, 22 (from the editor’s introduction); al-Ṭūsī, \textit{Kitāb al-ghayba}, 321 (no. 267); Goldziher, \textit{Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law}, 201 (note 98); Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 18. Amir-Moezzi adds that Ibn Bābūya (the father) cited messages in his \textit{al-Imāma wa-l-tabsira min al-ḥayra} that were transmitted by the Hidden Imam through his representatives. However, the chapter in which these messages appear (called \textit{bāb imāmat al-Qāʾim}) is in fact part of an addendum (\textit{mustadrak}) to the manuscript of \textit{al-Imāma wa-l-tabsira min al-ḥayra}. This addendum is composed of reports transmitted on the authority of Ibn Bābūya in the works of his son, al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq. This addendum was added to the Qum edition [Ibn Bābūya, \textit{al-Imāma wa-l-tabsira min al-ḥayra}] and does not appear in the manuscript itself nor in the later Beirut edition of the text [Ibn Bābūya, \textit{al-Imāma wa-l-tabsira min al-ḥayra}].

\textsuperscript{144} Al-Ṭabarī al-Imāmī, \textit{al-Mustarshad fī imāmat amīr al-muʾminīn ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalīl}, written to prove the imamate of ʿAli by a contemporary of al-Kulaynī. The scholar should not be confused with al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr (on whom, see chapter 4 of this dissertation). Several other works where one might expect to find accounts of Lesser Occultation encounters do not contain any such reports, e.g., ʿAlī al-Khazzāz al-Rāżī’s (\textit{fl.} 4th/10th cent.) \textit{Kitāyat at-ṭhar fī al-naṣṣ al-aʾimma al-ithnay ʿashar}, written to prove the investiture of the twelve Imams. The only hadith in this work that that speaks of someone seeing the Hidden Imam is the following attributed to Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī: “Praise be to God who did not cause me to leave the world before showing me my successor, he who most resembles the Messenger of God in his physical appearance as well as in his character (\textit{khalq} wa-\textit{khulq}). May God protect him during his \textit{ghayba} and cause him to appear so that he may fill the earth with equity and justice even as it has been filled with injustice and tyranny,” al-Rāżī, \textit{Kitāyat at-ṭhar}, 291. On the author, see \textit{idem}, 6-11; Amir-
some three decades after the start of the Greater Occultation mentions the names of 68 individuals who saw the Hidden Imam or witnessed his miracles during the Lesser Occultation.145

1.5. The Hidden Imam: Not Seen and Not Recognized

In fact, the overwhelming majority of hadiths and reports found in al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī and the earliest surviving ghayba apologias (on these works, see chapter 3) maintain that the Qāʾim cannot be seen or recognized during his ghayba in general and the second or longer ghayba in particular.

Moezzi, _Le Guide divin_, 56 [= Amir-Moezzi, _The Divine Guide_, 22]. Al-Rāzī does transmit a number of apocalyptic hadiths about the Mahdi preserved in earlier works, perhaps none more important for our concerns than a hadith ascribed to the Prophet identifying where the Imam will appear from. This hadith stipulates that when the world is filled with confusion and chaos (harj marj), God will grant permission to the Qāʾim to manifest himself from a village in Yemen called Karʿa. He will then emerge wearing a turban, equipped with the chain of the Prophet, entrusted with his sword, and preceded by a caller (cf. Qur’an 50:41) who will proclaim to the world: “This is the Mahdi, the Caliph of God! Follow him!” al-Rāzī, _Kitāyat al-athar_, 150-1. Other manuscripts of this work have Akraʿa, Karīma, and Karīmah instead of Karʿa, al-Rāzī, _Kitāyat al-athar_, 150 (note 7). This hadith in various forms is widely cited in Sunnī sources, e.g., al-Ḥamawi, _Muʿjam al-buldān_, 4:452 (under his entry for Karʿa about which he does not provide any further details); Cook, _Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic_, 179.

145 Al-Ṣadūq, _Kamāl al-dīn_, 406-7 (no. 16) > al-Majlisi, _Bihār al-anwār_, 52:30-31 (no. 26). Nūrī (d. 1320/1920) adds to this list some 240 other individuals who are said to have seen the Imam during the Lesser Occultation, Nūrī, _Najm-i thāqib_, 288-91 > al-Gulpāyigānī, _Muntakhab al-athar_, 377-81. Modern works thus mention over 300 people who are said to have seen the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation. See al-Zanjānī al-Najafi, ‘Aqāʾid al-imāmiyya al-īthnā ʿashariyya, 1: 248; Ṭāyyib, _Kalim al-ṭayyib dar taqrīr-i ʿaqāyid-i islām_, 537.
At the outset, we must point out that there are clear contradictions and inconsistencies in these sources. These contradictions reflect the *al-hayra* (confusion and perplexity) that reigned after the sudden and unexpected death of the eleventh Imam. In the chapter on the *ghayba* in al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī*, for example, conflicting hadiths are transmitted, at times from the same people, about the year of birth of the twelfth Imam and the number of *ghaybas* (one or two). One of the greatest discrepancies concerns the length of the *ghaybas*. According to a rare hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq, “the master of this *amr* will have two *ghaybas*. One of them will be longer than the other. The first (*ghayba*) will last forty days while the other (*ghayba*) will last six months or something close to that.” In contrast, a hadith ascribed to ʿAlī stipulates that there will be one *ghayba* which will last “six days, six months or six years.”

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147 See Newman, *Formative Period*, 150.

148 See Newman, *Formative Period*, 120, 139 (notes 17, 18); Newman, “Between Qumm and the West,” 95.

149 Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, 535 (no. 519). This hadith is not mentioned by any other scholar, either before or after al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr (on whom, see chapter 3).

150 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:338 (no. 7). Later scholars, obviously perturbed by the phrase, “six days, six months or six years,” altered it to “a period of time” or omitted it altogether. See Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 87, 103 (note 259). To the sources mentioned by Modarressi in this note can be added al-Mufīd, *al-Ikhtīṣās*, 209.
The hadith likewise present a conflicting picture about the nature of the ghayba. On the one hand, we find hadiths explicitly ruling out that the Imam can ever be seen, which of course is the definition of ghayba. It is said that the Qāʾim’s “body will not be seen and he is not called by his name” (lā yurā jismuhu wa-lā yusammā bi-ismihi).\textsuperscript{151} When Muḥammad b. Ziyād al-Azdi\textsuperscript{152} asked Mūsā al-Kāẓim about the verse, {He has lavished on you His blessings, outward and inward?} (Qur’an 31:20), the seventh Imam declared: “The outward blessing is the unconcealed Imam while the inward blessing is the hidden Imam…His body will be concealed from the eyes of men but his remembrance will not be absent from the hearts of the believers. He is the twelfth from among us.”\textsuperscript{153} A well-known hadith ascribed to the Prophet states that the Imam “will be hidden from his Shiʿa and his friends/initiates” (yaghīb ʿan shiʿatihi wa-awliyāʾihi), i.e., from everyone. The Prophet goes on to say that during the ghayba,

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\textsuperscript{151} Al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 1:333 (no. 3); Ibn Bābūya, al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra\textsuperscript{1}, 117; al-Khaṣībī, al-Hidāya al-kubrā, 364; al-Masʿūdī (attributed), Ithbāt al-waṣiyya, 266; al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 587 (no. 2) > al-Majlisi, Bihār al-anwār, 51:33 (no. 12); al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, Ithbāt al-hudā, 5:93 (no. 179), 5:107 (no. 226), 5:208 (no. 754).

\textsuperscript{152} Muḥammad b. Abī ʿUmayr Ziyād b. ʿĪsā Abū Āḥmad al-Azdī, considered trustworthy (thiqa) in the rijāl works. See al-Najāshī, Rijāl al-Najāshī, 326-7 (no. 887); Ibn Dāwūd, Rijāl Ibn Dāwūd, 159-60 (no. 1272); al-Khūʾī, Muʿjam rijāl al-ḥadīth, 15:291-306 (no. 10043); Modarressi, Tradition and Survival, index, s.v. ‘Ibn Abī ʿUmayr.’

the Imam’s partisans will be illumined by his light and benefit from his *walāya* in the same way that people draw benefit from the sun when hidden behind the clouds.\(^{154}\) This hadith was clearly meant to convey the message that the benefits of the Imamate continue despite the fact that the Imam is absent. Similarly, in a long hadith ascribed to ʿAlī, it is said that the Hidden Imam is omni-present, “moving from east to west, listening to the people and greeting them. He sees but is not seen. [In this manner, he passes time] until the [appointed] hour (cf. Qur’an 15:38, 38:81) [when] the promise [will be fulfilled] (cf. Qur’an 21:97) and the call of the one who calls from the sky (cf. Qur’an 50:41) [will be heard]. Truly, on that day, (blissful) joy

(cf. Qur’an 76:11) will be the lot for the progeny of ʿAlī and his Shiʿa.”

Other hadiths cited by al-Ṣadūq compare the Shiʿa to cattle searching for pasture yet unable to find it. The Imam “will not appear to them and they will not know his location.” Similar hadiths stating that “none will see him” (fa-lā yarāhu aḥad) or “his body/person will not been seen” (lā yurāshakhṣuhu) are found throughout the earliest ghayba works.

Rather than expect to see the Imam, the Shiʿa must wait patiently for the relief from grief and sorrow that his appearance (ẓuhūr) will deliver. Yearning for this deliverance or salvation (intizār al-faraj) is “the best of acts” (afḍal aʿmāl) and the greatest mode of worshipping God. Indeed, one of the purposes of intizār (again, yearning for the manifestation of the Imam) is to test (tamḥīs/intiḥān) the faith of the Shiʿa.

155 Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 146.
157 Ibn Bābūya, al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra; al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 165 (no. 1); al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 457 (no. 468); al-Majlisī, Bihār al-anwār, 52:94-5 (no. 9), 52:145 (no. 67).
158 Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 237.
159 Al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 353 (no. 1).
160 Al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 584 (no. 3). See also the other hadiths in the same bāb, entitled, “mā ruwiya fī thawāb al-muntazir lil-faraj” as well as the hadiths mentioned al-Kāshānī, Nawādir al-akhbār, 249-51 (bāb intizār al-faraj fī ghaybatih). On the Shiʿī conception of intiẓār, see Turner, Islam without Allah?,
1.5.1. The Hidden Imam: Not Seen and Not Recognized on Pilgrimage

That the Imam will live amongst the people incognito is perhaps best represented in a number of hadiths stating that the Qāʾim attends the pilgrimage each year. According to a hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq, “the year that the master of this amr does not attend pilgrimage, the pilgrimage of the people is not accepted” (al-ʿām alladhī lā yashhad šāhib hādhā al-amr al-mawsim lā yuqbal min al-nās ḥajjuhum). Moreover, a set of four hadiths likewise attributed to al-Ṣādiq and transmitted on the authority of Zurāra b. Aʿyān (d. 148-9/765-7) or his son


161 See, e.g., al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 339-40 (nos. 286-8); Nawādir al-akhbār, 251-2 (bāb al-tamḥīs).

162 Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, Dalāʾil al-imāma, 487 (no. 485); al-Bahrānī, Ḥilyat al-abrār, 6:283 (no. 7). Al-Bahrānī adds here that Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (known as al-Shahīd al-Thānī) (d. 965/1557-8 or 966/1558-9) has mentioned (a hadith?) in his Manāsik that when the master of the amr attends the pilgrimage, Iblīs does not.

ʿUbayd, ¹⁶⁴ affirm that while the Qāʾim is present on pilgrimage and sees and recognizes the
pilgrims, they are incapable of seeing him:

1. “The people will miss their Imam. He will attend the pilgrimage and see them but they will
not see him.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ ʿUbayd b. Zurāra b. Aʿyan was a hadith transmitter from Kūfa. On him, see Modarressi, Tradition
and Survival, 383-4.

¹⁶⁵ Al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 1:337-8 (no. 6) > al-Ḥalabi, Taqrib al-maʿārif, 432; al-Kāshānī, al-Wāfī, 2:413
(no. 917); al-Ḥurr al-ʿAmili, Ithbāt al-hudā, 5:55 (no. 19). The same mutan with a slightly different isnād
is cited by al-Ṣadūq in the chapter of his work on hadiths ascribed to al-Ṣādiq concerning the Qāʾim and
his ghayba, al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 330 (no. 49). Cf. a slightly different version of the hadith with
similar isnād recorded by al-Ṣadūq on the authority of his father in al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn 325 (no. 34),
404 (no. 7) > al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, Dalāʾil al-imāma, 482 (no. 477), 531 (no. 509). Al-Majlisi considered this hadith to be weak (daʿīf), al-Majlisi, Mirāt al-ʿaqūl, 4:42, but nonetheless mentions the different versions in his Biḥār al-anwār, 52, 151-2
(no. 2). Persian translation: Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī, Bayān al-furqān, 899. The verb yafqid means both ‘to
lose’ and ‘to miss’ and is found in the Quranic story of Joseph (Q 12:71-2). Other hadiths use the same
verb, for example, a hadith ascribed to al-Kāẓim begins with: “When the fifth descendant of the seventh
goes missing (fuqīda)...” al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 156 (no. 11). Also “The master of this amr will be
missed for a time” (ṣāḥib hādhā al-amr yufqad zamān), al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 162 (no. 5). A form of
this verb is found in a rare report in which al-Ṣādiq, after traveling with a follower to a mysterious
island, tells his companion that whenever an Imam goes missing (uftuqīda), rather than die, he travels to
the island and waits there for the time of his return (see chapter 4 below).
2. “The Qāʾīm will have two ghaybas. During one of them, he will attend the pilgrimage. He will see the people but they will not see him.”

3. “The people will miss an Imam. He will attend the pilgrimage. He will see (the people) but they will not see him.”


167 Al-Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba*, 180 (no. 13). Hadiths 1 and 3 speak generically about al-Kulaynī, al-Nuʿmānī and all of the scholars who followed them clearly believed that they applied to the Qāʾīm. The first three hadiths have the name of Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Mālik b. ʿĪsā b. Sābūr al-Fazārī in the isnād, a Kūfan mawlā of Asmāʾ b. Khārija b. Ḥishn al-Fazārī who al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 122 (no. 313), calls a weak reporter of hadith: “Ahmad b. Ḥusayn said that he used to grossly fabricate hadith (yaḍaʿ al-hadīth waḍʿ an) and report from unknown persons. I heard someone say that he believed in corrupt doctrines and was misguided in his narration of hadith” (fāsid al-madhhab wa-l-riwāya), which according to Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 22, usually designates those “who split from the community and established their own heretical sects on the basis of their interpretations.” Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī (fl. mid. 5th cent./11 cent.), *al-Rijāl li-Ibn al-Ghaḍāʾirī*, 48 (no. 27), called him a liar (kadhdhāb) who held doctrines elevating the Imam (wa-fī madhhabihī irtifāʿ) and stated that he transmitted hadiths from weak and unknown narrators. On this basis, he ruled all of the hadiths narrated by him are rejected (matrūk al-hadīth jumlatan). (The expressions ahl al-irtifāʿ and fī madhhabihī irtifāʿ are used in early Shiʿī rijāl works to describe the Mufawwida. See Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 24-5). Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī*, 418 (no. 6037), says that he was formerly trustworthy but certain people caused him to become a weak transmitter (thiqā wa-yuḍaʿīthū qawm) and that he narrated many strange things concerning the birth of the Qāʾīm.
4. “The Qāʾim will have two ghaybas. He will return in one of them while in the second, it will not be known where he is. He will attend the pilgrimage and see the people but they will not see him.”

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1.6. The Hidden Imam: Seen but not recognized

Side by side with the hadiths stating that the Imam cannot be seen, there are hadiths and reports that maintain that he can be seen but cannot be recognized as an Imam. One cannot but notice the contrast between the four hadiths above stating explicitly that the Imam cannot be seen during the pilgrimage and the following report attributed to Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-ʿAmrī (d. ca. 305/917), later canonized as the second of the four official representatives (sufarāʾ) of the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation:

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ مُوسَى بْنُ ʿعَمْرُ ٱلْحَمْيَرِيَّ عَنْ ٱلنَّاسِ قَالَ لَيَحْضُرَ ٱللَّهُ إِنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ ٱلْمَوْسِمَ كُلُّ سَنَةٍ يَرَىٰ وَيَعْرِفُهُمْ وَيَرَوْنَهُ وَلَا يَعْرِفُونَهُ

“I swear to God! The master of this amr attends the pilgrimage every year. He sees the people and recognizes them while they see him but do not recognize him.”

In reports and hadiths of this kind affirming that the Hidden Imam can be seen without being recognized, the Qāʾīm is often compared with Joseph. In fact, as we began to see earlier, no other prophet, with the exception of Muḥammad, is compared more often to the Qāʾīm than Joseph. Allegory and typology are the most frequently marshaled methods employed in these

169 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 404 (no. 8); al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yahḍuruhu al-faqīh*, 2:520; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, 363-4 (with minor differences); al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 52:152 (no. 4; from *Kamāl al-dīn*) = Majlisī, *Mahdī-i mawʿūd* (trans. Urmīyyah-ī), 1:747-8; al-Bahrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, 6:282 (no. 4); Şamādī, “Barrasi-i masʿalah-yi didār bā imām-i zamān,” 196; Amir Arjomand, “Imam Absconditus and the Beginnings of a Theology of Occultation,” 2. According to two reports transmitted by the same narrator in al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn*, al-ʿAmrī saw the Hidden Imam in Mecca. In the first report, when asked if he saw the master of the amr, al-ʿAmrī answered yes and added that the last pledge he made to him was at the Kaʿba, Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 404 (no. 9); al-Bahrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, 6:282 (no. 5). In the second report, al-ʿAmrī says that he saw the Imam clinging to the curtains of the Kaʿba at the wall called al-Mustajār (tradition has it that this was where Ṭāli was born), praying: “O God! Take revenge on my enemies for my sake!” (*allāhumma intaqim li min aʿdāʾī*), Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 404 (no. 10); al-Bahrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, 6:282 (no. 5). Cf. al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, 252, who has, “Take revenge on your enemies for my sake” (*intaqim li min aʿdāʾika*), and al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 51:351, who has, “Take revenge on your enemies through me” (*intaqim bi min aʿdāʾika*). It is of course possible that the four hadiths introduced in the previous section can be reconciled with the above report though I am only aware of one Shiʿī scholar who has attempted this reconciliation, namely al-Majlisī, who in glossing one of the four previous hadiths, suggests that “perhaps by the word ‘seeing’ [in these hadiths] is meant recognizing (*wa-laʾalla al-murād...bil-ruʿya al-maʿrifā*), in other words, none of the people will recognize him (*ay lā yaʾrifīhu aḥad min al-nās*),” al-Majlisī, *Mīrāt al-ʿuqūl*, 4:47.
hadiths. The Qāʾim “will have a ghayba like the ghayba of Joseph.” A hadith of likely Wāqifi origin ascribed to al-Ṣādiq and transmitted by al-Baṭā’ini predicts that just as God placed a figurative veil (ḥijāb) between Joseph and the people so that they saw him without the ability to recognize him (yarawna wa-lā yaʿrifūnahu), the master of the amr will likewise be veiled from the people. In other words, the people will see him without discerning that he is the

170 Al-Nu'mānī, al-Ghayba, 149. Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, 198-9, states “it is not clear at all why Joseph was chosen in place of some other long-lived prophet.” If Joseph’s ghayba and suffering in imprisonment were the only qualities that the Qāʾim was to manifest, one could wonder why, but other Shiʿi hadiths indicate that the Qāʾim will manifest many other attributes of Joseph, chief among them his beauty (Joseph serving as the embodiment and archetype of beauty, comeliness, modesty and beneficence in Islamic literature; for which, see, e.g., Majlisī, Ḥayāt al-qulūb, 3:711, where Joseph is described as exceeding all others in beauty as the full moon excels the star (ziyādatī-i ḥusn-i ā bar sāyīr-i mānand-i ziyādatī-i māh-i shab-i chahārdahum būd bar sitārigān); Schimmel, A Two-Colored Brocade, 64, 66). For example, a hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir states that in his beauty and magnanimity (jamālihi wa-sakhāʾihi), the Qāʾim will manifest the beauty and magnanimity of Joseph, al-Masʿūdī (attributed), Ithbāt al-waṣiyya, 267. According to a number of hadiths, the Qāʾim will appear wearing Joseph’s shirt, see, e.g., al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 1:143; a much rarer hadith adds that “the believers throughout the world (lit., east and west) will then smell its scent. This is the same shirt whose scent Jacob sensed when he said, {I sense the scent of Joseph!} (Qur’an 92:12)” (yahruṯ wa-ʿalayh, qamīṣ yūṣūf ā-yashammt al-muʿminūn rāʾīḥatī sharq wa-huwa alladhī shammī raʾīḥatī yaʿqūb fī qawlihi {innī la-ajīd rīḥ yūṣūf}). The earliest and only work in which I have found this particular hadith is al-Bayāḍī (d. 877/1472-3), al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm ʿilā mustahiqqī al-taqdīm, 2:253, though he does not provide a source, saying only that the hadith has been narrated on the authority of al-Ṣadiq’s discipline, al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī. On the symbolism of Joseph’s short and its scent, see now, Lawson, “Typological Figuration and the Meaning of “Spiritual”: The Qur’anic Story of Joseph” (forthcoming).

Imam. According to al-Šādiq, the Qā’im “knows the people but they do not recognize him just as Joseph knew the people but they failed to recognize him” (yaʿrif al-nās wa-lā yaʿrifūnahu kamā kāna yūsuf yaʿrif al-nās wa-hum lahu munkirūn), an allusion to Qur’an 12:58: {And the brethren of Joseph came, and entered unto him, and he knew them, but they knew him not} (fa-ʿarafahum wa-lum lahu munkirūn). In this connection, al-Šādiq points out that even though the brothers of Joseph were his kinsmen, they were unable to recognize him before he manifested himself to them and proclaimed {I am Joseph} (Qur’an 12:90). And when Joseph was in Egypt, he lived a distance of only eighteen days travel from Jacob. God could have easily apprised Jacob about Joseph’s location but chose not to. Thus, al-Šādiq asks rhetorically: Who is to say that God cannot conceal His Proof (i.e., the Hidden Imam) in the same manner that He concealed Joseph from his family? In other words, like Joseph, the Qā’im is in close proximity to the believers during his ghayba but they are unable to see him or know his location before his ẓuhūr at the end of time. A similar hadith ascribed to al-Šādiq explicates the

172 Al-Nu‘mānī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 144 (no. 2); al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, Ithbāt al-hudā, 5:144 (no. 462); al-Majlī, Biḥār al-anwār, 51:112-3 (no. 8); Dhākirī, “Irtibāṭ bā imām-i zamān,” 61.

173 Cf. the words attributed to the Shaykhī leader Kāzim al-Rashti (d. 1259/1843) about the Hidden Imam, addressing his disciples: “You behold Him with your own eyes…and yet recognize Him not!” [Zarandi], The Dawn-Breakers (trans. Shoghi Effendi), 25.

174 Al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 320-1 (no. 21); al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 167 (no. 4).
prophetic precedent (*sunna*) that the Qāʾim will manifest: “As for Joseph, his brothers spoke with him and paid homage to him but could not recognize him (*wa-ammā sunnat Yūsuf fa-inna ikhwatahu kānū yubāyīʿūnahu wa-yukhāṭibūnahu wa-lā yaʿrifūnahu*).”

Another hadith comparing the Hidden Imam to previous prophets insists that the Imam will not only be hidden from the generality of believers but also from his closest disciples (*al-ghayba min khāṣṣatihi wa-ʿāmmatihi*) just as Joseph was concealed from his brethren despite the close distance between him and his father, family and partisans. These hadiths affirm again and again that like Joseph, the Hidden Imam “walks in their markets” (*yasīr fī aswāqihim*; cf. Qur'an 25:7, 25:20), lives amongst the people and associates with them. The people see him but are bereft of the ability to recognize him.

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175 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 39. Cf. al-Karājki, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, 1:374 and al-Ḥalabī, *Taqrīb al-maʿārif*, 431, both of whom cite a similar ‘prophetic-precedent’ hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir stating in part that the prophetic precedent of Joseph that the Qāʾim will manifest is “*ghayba* from his family in such wise that he will not recognize them and they will in turn be unable to recognize him” (*wa-ammā Yūsuf fā-l-ghayba ʿan ahlihī bi-haythu lā yaʿrifūhum wa-lā yaʿrifūnahu*). The wording here is odd since in the Qur’an, Joseph clearly recognizes his brothers. Al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:198 (no. 690), attempted to correct this anomaly by removing the first occurrence of the word *lā* and rendering the hadith: *wa-ammā Yūsuf fā-l-ghayba ʿan ahlihī bi-haythu yaʿrifūhum wa-lā yaʿrifūnahu*.


As we have seen, the first set of hadiths presented in section 1.5 suggests that no one can see the Imam. The second set presented in section 1.6, on the other hand, affirm that it is indeed possible to see the Imam though no one, not even his closest followers, are capable of recognizing him.

\[ \text{furqān, 901. See also Aminī, Dādgustar-i jahān, 205, 215 [= Amini, al-Imām al-Mahdī (trans. Sachedina), 210, 222]. Cf. hadiths cited in both Sunni and Shiʿi works about al-Khaḍir and Ilyās (Elijah) who are said to be alive “walking on earth” (bāqiyyān yasīrān fī al-arḍ), al-Majlisi, Biḥār al-anwār, 51:98.} \]
CHAPTER 2

Hidden From All Yet Seen by Some? The Case of 3 Shīʿī Hadiths

On what basis then do later Shīʿī scholars (on whom, see chapter 4 below) who contend that it is possible to see and recognize the Hidden Imam base their assertion? As one might expect, these scholars tend to emphasize the stories of sighting and encounters with the Imam as the greatest proof that seeing and contacting the Hidden Imam is possible during the Greater Occultation. Yet, in face of the final tawqīʿ of the Imam (mentioned in the introduction above; further details in chapter 3) and the hadiths we discussed in chapter 1 explicitly denying that the Imam can be recognized during the ghayba, they have sensed a need to support their position with traditional proofs (al-dalāʾil al-naqliyya). Three hadiths – and only three – found in the earliest sources have been adduced and glossed by these scholars as leaving open the possibility of a special cadre of believers to encounter (and recognize) the Imam during the

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178 Nūrī (on whom, see chapter 4), for examples, claims: “Let it be known that we have limited ourselves in citing the stories [of encounters with the Hidden Imam] to what we found in credible books (kutub-i muṭabarah) or heard from trustworthy scholars and ulama. We left out a number of accounts which did not have a reliable chain of transmission,” Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 2:846. The publisher of a recently published compilation of such stories claims that “since there are so many widely attested reports (al-akhbār al-kathīra wa-l-mutawātira) from ulama and scholars (al-fuḍalāʾ) (who met the Hidden Imam), no one can deny or reject (this fact) and say it is impossible to see him during the occultation (lā
Greater Occultation. In this chapter, we will introduce and comment on these three hadiths, critically assess how they have been understood by Shi‘i scholars, and offer suggestions about their Sitz im Leben.

2.1. Hadith 1: “the 30 are never lonely”

The first hadith (henceforth, Hadith 1) is found in al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī:

A number of our masters < Ahmād b. Muḥammad < al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Washshā’ < ʿAlī b. Abī Ḥamza (al-Baṭāʾīnī) < Abū Baṣīr < al-Ṣādiq:

اعدّةٌ من أصḥابنا عن أحمّد بن محمّد عن الحسن بن عليّ الوعّاش عن عليّ بن أبي حمزّة عن أبي بصير


179 Dhākirī, “Irtibāṭ bā imām-i zamān.”

180 This formula is not common in hadiths cited in al-Kāfī but suggests that al-Kulaynī considered the hadith as one attested to by multiple chains of transmission.


183 On him, see chapter 1.

184 Abū Muḥammad Yahyā b. al-Qāsim al-Asadī (d. 149-50/767), known by his alternative kunya of Abū Baṣīr, a Kūfān mawlā and one of the most prolific transmitters of hadith from Imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, al-Najāshī, Rijāl al-Najāshī, 441 (no. 1187); Modarressi, Tradition and Survival, 395, Buyukkara, “The Schism in the Party of Mūsā al-Kāzim and the Emergence of the
The master of this *amr* will be forced into hiding and he will certainly be isolated during his *ghayba*.\(^{185}\) Tayba is the best abode and the thirty are never lonely (lit., and in thirty, there is no loneliness).\(^{186}\)

Following al-Kulaynī, two scholars in the following century, both of whom we will return to in chapter 3, presented this hadith in their works:

1. Al-Nuʿmānī (d. 345/956 or 360/971), who transmitted numerous hadiths from his teacher al-Kulaynī and personally copied the latter’s *al-Kāfī*,\(^{187}\) includes Hadith 1 verbatim in his *al-Ghayba* (completed in Dhū al-Ḥijja 342/April-May 954).\(^{188}\)

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\(^{185}\)This sentence can be translated in a number of ways, e.g., “A *ghayba* is inevitable/indispensable for the master of this *amr* and it is inevitable that he will be isolated during his *ghayba*.” Cf. hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq: “The Qāʾim must go into hiding” (*la budda lil-qāʾim min ghayba*). When pressed as to why, al-Ṣādiq responds while pointing to his stomach to show that the Qāʾim will be in danger of being killed, because “he fears for his life” (*yakhāf ʿalā nafsihi*), al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 437 (no. 7). For a different translation of this and a similar hadith, Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, 277 (note 612).


2. Abū al-Ṣalāḥ al-Ḥalabī (d. 447/1055) cites Hadith 1 without an isnād in his Taqrīb al-maʿārif, though in his version, the enigmatic phrase, “and the thirty are never lonely,” (discussed below) is excised.¹⁸⁹

Moreover, al-Ṭūsī (d. 459 or 460/1066-7), who will we also return to in chapter 3, recorded a similar hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir (rather al-Ṣādiq) with a slightly different isnād in his Kitāb al-ghayba, completed in 447/1055-6:


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¹⁸⁹ Al-Ḥalabī, Taqrīb al-maʿārif, 431.


¹⁹¹ This is likely ‘Ali b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abbān al-Rāzī al-Kūlī, known as ʿAlān (or ʿAllān), the maternal uncle of Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kūlīnī, who is the author of a work that has not survived called Kitāb akhībār al-Qāʾim, al-Najāshī, Rijāl al-Najāshī, 260-1 (no. 682). Al-Kulaynī transmits a number of hadiths from him in al-Kāfī.


The master of this *amr* will be forced to become isolated, but he will definitely have power in his isolation. The thirty are never lonely and Tayba is the best abode.\(^{196}\)

**Hadith 1: Commentary**

The most important name in the *isnād* of this hadith is the aforementioned ʿAlī b. Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭāʾinī. Al-Majlisī is the only scholar to have formally graded this hadith as defined by the specific principles of ʿīlm al-dirāya /ʿīlm dirāyat al-ḥadīth (the science of knowledge of the Traditions). He classified it as either “weak or reliable/dependable” (ḍaʿīf aw

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\(^{194}\) On him, see above.

\(^{195}\) On him, see above.

though he does not provide a reason. Other than al-Baṭāʾīnī, the other individuals in the hadith’s isnād are considered trustworthy (thiqā) in the various rijāl works.

It would thus be safe to presume that al-Majlisi’s rather uncertain classification is based on the presence in the isnād of the impugned Wāqīfī, al-Baṭāʾīnī. Though al-Majlisi does not say so explicitly, he seems to be implying that if al-Baṭāʾīnī transmitted this hadith during the lifetime of al-Ṣādiq or al-Kāẓim (and thus, as a prophetic statement about the twelfth Imam), it could be considered muwaththaq, but if he transmitted the hadith after al-Kāẓim’s death, it was to be deemed ḍaʿīf since al-Baṭāʾīnī would have fabricated the hadith to support his claim that al-Kāẓim was the Qāʾīm who had not died but was in fact hiding, though not in Iraq where he had been imprisoned but rather back in Tayba (Medina as we will see below), with 30 of his followers.

197 Al-Majlisi, Mīrāt al-ʿuqūl, 4:50. ḍaʿīf (4) and muwaththaq (3) are the lowest categories of Shiʿī hadith classification, ḥasan (“good”) (2) and saḥīḥ (“sound”) (1) being the higher two. For descriptions of all four categories, see Ahmad, “Twelver Shiʿī Ḥadīth,” 138-9 and Afsaruddin, Excellence and Precedence, 204-6. A fifth category, ṣaʿīf (“strong”), that comes between muwaththaq and ḍaʿīf is not as common as the other four. See al-Fadli, Introduction to Hadith, 116-7; Modarressi, An Introduction to Shiʿī Law 5-6.

198 On the four main classical Shiʿī rijāl works (which are al-Kashshī’s (d. 367/978) Kitāb maʿrifat al-nāqilīn ‘an al-aʾimma al-ṣādiqīn, available in a version abridged by al-Ṭūsī and called Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl; al-Ṭūsī’s Kitāb al-rijāl and Kitāb fiḥrist kutub al-Shīʿa; and al-Najāshī’s Kitāb al-rijāl), see Modarressi, An Introduction to Shiʿī Law, 5. On al-Kashshī, see now Takim, “Kašši, Abu ʿAmr Moḥammad,” Elr (online edition).
Here we will gloss the key phrases of this Tradition:

ʿuzla. “and he will certainly be isolated during his ghayba”

ʿUzla (synonyms: khalwa, waḥda, infirād, inqiṭāʿ) denotes withdrawing oneself from association with others and retiring into seclusion. It is similar to the concept of iʿtikāf or the seclusion of oneself, usually in a place of worship (and often during Ramaḍān), to perform a religious exercise or practice, à la khalwa, a technical term in Islamic mysticism.\(^{199}\) Not surprisingly, ʿuzla is used in a similar sense in Shiʿī sources.\(^{200}\) However, in commenting on this hadith, Shiʿī scholars have agreed, in light of other Traditions, that the Imam’s seclusion was not voluntary; rather, he was forced to withdraw from the community and enter ghayba out of fear for his life.\(^{201}\)

\(^{199}\) See Melchert, “Asceticism,” *EI*³ (online edition); Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:2036.


\(^{201}\) Safeguarding the life of the Imam from danger is the main reason given in Shiʿī hadiths for the ghayba, the other reason known only to God. According to a report narrated by a certain Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṣāliḥī, identified in later sources as one of the deputies (wukalāʾ) of the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation, the location of the Imam could not be revealed to his followers out of fear that “if they learned [his] location, they would reveal it [to others]” (*in ʿarafū al-makān dallū ʿalayhī*), al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:333 (no. 2); Kohlberg, “Taqiyya in Shiʿī Theology and Religion,” 349. See also Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 103-6, 145. For a discussion of other representative Traditions, see
**ghayba.** “and he will certainly be isolated during his ghayba”

Hadith 1 has been understood by some as referring only to the first ghayba, commonly referred to in later sources as the Lesser Occultation. In his remarks on this hadith in his *al-Ḥāshiyya ʿalā ʿusūl al-kāfī*, Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1033/1623-4 or 1036/1626-7) – widely considered the founder (*muʾassis*) or propagator (*murawwij*) of the Akhbārī school (depending on one’s view concerning its origins)\(^{202}\) – states that Hidden Imam likely lived in Medina during the Lesser Occultation where he sought the company of 30 of his friends/initiates (*kāna yastaʾnis bi-thalāthīn min awliyāʾih*).\(^{203}\) His opinion that Hadith 1 applies to the Lesser Occultation was also held by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭūrayḥī (d. 1087/1676-7), author of the important Shīʿī lexicon, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*,\(^{204}\) as well as by Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679), who comments in his hadith compendium *al-Wāfī* that “it seems that [this hadith] refers to (the

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Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin*, 277. As we will see in chapter 3, the late 4th/10th and 5th/11th century rationalists offer the Imam’s self-protection as *the* rationale (*ʿilla*) for the *ghayba*.


Imam’s) short ghayba [i.e., the Lesser Occultation] because during the long (ghayba) [i.e., the Greater Occultation], there is no way for his Shi’a to reach him” (fa-inna fī al-ṭawila laysa li-shi’atihī ilayhi sabīlun).\(^\text{205}\) Al-Kāshānī’s statement that the Imam is unreachable during the Greater Occultation may appear odd in light of the fact that he was among the first authorities to transmit two popular and controversial stories in his Nawādir al-akhbār fī mā yata’allaq bī-uṣūl al-dīn and ‘Ilm al-yaqīn fī uṣūl al-dīn of Shi’a who travelled during the Greater Occultation to mysterious islands ruled by the Hidden Imam and his sons (see below, chapter 4), and the fact that he affirms the ontological reality of “the world of images” (‘ālam al-mithāl)\(^\text{206}\) in his

\(^{204}\) Al-Ṭurayḥī, Majma’ al-baḥrayn, 2:110.

\(^{205}\) Al-Kāshānī, al-Wāfī, 2:416. Al-Kāshānī adds, “When (the twelfth Imam) isolated himself and hid in (Medina), 30 of his Shi’a were with him (wa-ma’ahu thalāthin min shi’atihī), keeping each other company. As a result, they were never lonely (fa-lā waḥ shata lahum).”

Kalimāt-i māknūna as the realm where “the Holy Imams [including presumably the Hidden Imam] are present when they appear before a dying person.” 207 It is possible that al-Kāshānī believed that whereas the generality of Shiʿa could not reach the Imam during the Greater Occultation, a special group could and in fact has encountered the Imam as reflected in the accounts he chose to transmit and the interpretation he advances on Hadith 2 (see below).

Most scholars, however, have interpreted this hadith as applying to the Greater Occultation. According, for example, to Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī (d. 1080/1669 or


207 Translated in Corbin, Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth (trans. Pearson), 178, and discussed in Lawson, “Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī and the World of Images,” 26. On al-Kāshānī’s Kalimāt-i māknūna, see Lawson, “The Hidden Words of Fayḍ Kāshānī,” 427-47. However, as Lawson points out elsewhere, al-Kāshānī does not speak of the possibility of encountering the Hidden Imam in the ʿālam al-mithāl while a believer is alive, Lawson, “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy,” 136. That the Imams appear to a dying person is a Shiʿī axiom. Al-Majlisī, al-ʿIʿtiqādāt, 27, mentions as part of his survey of Shiʿī doctrines that “the Prophet and the twelve [] Imams appear at the death of [both] the pious and the sinners, the believers and the infidels. The believers benefit from their intercession in easing the throes of death…” In a different creedal work, al-Majlisī, al-ʿAqāʿid, 67, he states that according to Shiʿī hadiths, the tears that flow from the eyes of the believers when they die stem from the exceeding gladness and exultation they feel at the moment of death from beholding the Prophet and the Imams (min shiddat faraḥihim wasūrūthim bi-ruʿyatihim al-nabī wa-l-aʾimma). Restating the traditional Ashʿarī bi-lā kayfā “solution,” al-Majlisī adds that it is not necessary to think about how this vision will take place (wa-lā yalzam al-taʾfakkur fi kayfiyyat dhālik), but is quick to rule out any attempt to arrive at an esoteric interpretation of the words of the Imams in this regard (wa-lā yajūz al-taʾwil).
the locution \{and he will certainly be isolated during his ghayba\} is a reference (\textit{īshāra}) to the Greater Occultation since it is widely believed that during (the Greater Occultation), (the Imam) is isolated from everyone (\textit{li-annahu yaʿtazilu fīhā al-nās jamiʿ an}). However, al-Māzandarānī is quick to add that in some manuscripts, this sentence of Hadith 1 is missing the word \textit{budda}, generating a diametrically opposite meaning: \{and he will not be isolated during his ghayba\} (\textit{wa-lā lahu fī ghaybatīhi min ʿuzla}). He explains this divergent text by suggesting that the Imam is among the people and sees them while they cannot see him despite the fact that they benefit from his presence among them.\footnote{Al-Māzandarānī, \textit{Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī}, 6:243-4.} It would seem that he prefers this latter version of the sentence as it agrees with the purport of the hadiths we introduced in chapter 1.5.

Asad Allāh al-Shaftī (d. 1290/1873) likewise opined that Hadith 1 “in all likelihood” refers to the Greater Occultation because the Imam was not completely isolated during the

\footnote{Al-Māzandarānī was a student of among others, Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlīsī (d. 1070/1659-60) and Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī, known as al-Shaykh al-Bahāʾī (d. 1030/1621), and a teacher of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlīsī and al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī. His commentary on the \textit{Uṣūl al-kāfī} astringently criticizes Mullā Ṣadrā’s commentary. See Barāri-Fandari, “Mullā Ṣāliḥ Māzandarānī,” esp. 108, and Kohlberg, “Kolayni,” \textit{Elr} (online edition).}
Lesser Occultation. Nūrī (d. 1320/1902) was even more confident in interpreting Hadith 1 to mean that in every generation throughout the Greater Occultation, “thirty believers attain (the Imam’s) presence.” This interpretation has been advanced by numerous other scholars post-Nūrī to defend their interpretation that thirty believers in any given age are privileged to be in contact with the Imam. On the basis of this interpretation, the veracity of the stories of ulama who have claimed to have contacted the Imam during the Greater Occultation is established in their minds. Prominent Iraqi grand ayatollah Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr (d. 1419/1999), for example, maintains that “this hadith...proves that a group of people in every generation recognize the Mahdī, are in contact with him, and dispel [his] loneliness (ḥādhā al-khabar...yuthbit anna jamāʿa min al-nās fī kull jīl yaʿrifūna al-mahdī wa-yattaṣilūna bihi wa-yarfāʿūna ʿanhu al-waḥsha).”

**Ṭayba.** “Ṭayba is the best abode”

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210 Al-Shafti, Kitāb al-ghayba, 2:301 (no. 228).

211 Al-Nūrī, Jannat al-maʾwā, 148.

212 Al-Ṣadr, Tārīkh al-ghayba al-kubrā, 68. Similarly, Lebanese scholar Muḥammad Jamīl Ḥammūd (al-ʿĀmilī) argues “while it is well-evident (min al-maʿlūm) that the elite mawālī who see (the Imam) during the Greater Occultation are not the Mahdi’s representatives or deputies, this hadith [in stating that thirty believers have contact with the Imam] proves the veracity (of their claims).” Ḥammūd, Abbā al-murād fī sharḥ muʾtamar ʿulamāʾ Baghdad, 2:677 (on the elite mawālī, see below). See also ʿIrāqī-Maythami, Dār al-salām, 192, for a similar reading.
All Shi‘ī commentators of this hadith agree that Ṭayba is a reference to Medina (madīnat al-nabi).\textsuperscript{213} According to classical Islamic sources, Ṭayba ("the sweet-smelling") was an honorific name bestowed on Medina by the Prophet himself.\textsuperscript{214} This is affirmed by commentators who adduce Hadith 1 as proof that just as Muḥammad lived in Medina, so likewise the Imam resides in or around Medina during the ghayba.\textsuperscript{215}

In his comments on this hadith in his Mirʾāt al-ʿuqūl fī sharḥ akhbār al-rasūl, widely recognized as “arguably the most useful and comprehensive commentary”\textsuperscript{216} on al-Ḵāfī, al-Majlisī reasoned that “(the Imam) is likely always in Medina or its environs [during the Greater Occultation] or was there during the Lesser Occultation. It is has also been said that Ṭayba is the name of a place other than Medina where he lives with his companions but this is mere conjecture (rajm bi-l-ghayb).” Al-Majlisī then refers to a hadith recorded in al-Ḵāfī in which

\textsuperscript{213} Majlisī, Mahdī-i mawʿūd (trans. Davānī), 930.

\textsuperscript{214} Ibn Manẓūr, Līsān al-ʿarab, 1:56; Watt, “al-Madina,” EI\textsuperscript{2}, 5:994.


\textsuperscript{216} Kohlberg, “Kolayni,” Elr (online edition). Strangely, this important work is not mentioned in Hairi, “Majlisī, Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir,” EI\textsuperscript{2}, 5:1086-8.
Ḥasan al-ʿAskari, when asked where to look for his successor should something happen to him, answered, “in Medina.”  

Since Hadith 1 is almost certainly of *Wāqifi* origins, it is not surprising to see Medina mentioned as the abode of the Qāʾim. Over and above the city being the refuge of the Prophet from his adversaries, Medina was the birthplace of Mūsā al-Kāẓim (b. 128/745). Al-Kāẓim lived in Medina all of his life, with two exceptions (i.e., two times in which he was absent (*ghāʾib*) from his followers in Medina, in effect, in *ghayba*): (1) He was briefly arrested by the Abbasid caliph Muḥammad b. Manṣūr al-Mahdī (r. 158/775-169/785) and detained in the Abbasid capital of Baghdad sometime between 163/779-80 and 166/782-3. According to al-Ṭabarī, after al-Mahdī was chastised in a dream by ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, he immediately released al-Kāẓim who subsequently returned to Medina; (2) He was arrested again at the order of Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) in 179/795-6 and once again brought to Baghdad, where he is said to have been killed at the behest of the caliph in 183/799.  

The *Wāqifs* who contended that as the Qāʾīm, al-Kāẓim had not died, could point to this hadith from al-Ṣādiq (or rather,  

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217 This hadith is recorded in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:328 (no. 2). See also al-Masʿūdī (attributed), *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, 229.

fabricate it) to make the case that he had returned to Medina where he was in the company of thirty of his closest followers.

**The Number 30: “the thirty are never lonely”**

The meaning of this critical though enigmatic phrase is unclear. Shi'i sources commonly number the Qāʾīm’s companions at “313,” the same number of men who according to Shi'i sources fought alongside the Prophet at the Battle of Badr.219 What then is the significance of the number thirty? Schimmel observes that in Judeo-Christian sources, the number 30 is connected with ideas of order and justice,220 two principles that are closely connected to the

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219 The fact that 313 is also the *abjad* numerical value of the word *jaysh* (army) is not merely a coincidence [on this, see Amir-Moezzi, “Aspects de la Figure du Sauveur dans l’Eschtologie Chiite Duodécimaine,” 221]. Al-Nuʿmānī records five hadiths with this number in chapter 20 of his work concerning “the army of wrath that is the companions of the Qāʾīm, their number, their characteristics, how they will be tested, and [who] they will fight,” al-Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba*, 325-31 (nos. 3,6,7,8,9). Another notable hadith found in this chapter and ascribed to al-Ṣādiq states that even if all the people of the world abandoned the Qāʾīm, God would enable his companions (*aṣḥābuhu*), who been preserved for him (*maḥfūzat*a lahu), to reach and succor him. Several Quranic verses are then interpreted as having been revealed about these companions, e.g., 6:89, and most notably, 5:54: {God will assuredly bring a people He loves, and who love Him, humble towards the believers, disdainful towards the unbelievers, men who struggle in the path of God, not fearing the reproach of any reproacher}, al-Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba*, 330 (no. 12). The fact that this hadith is not among the Traditions adduced by Shi'i scholars as proof that a special cadre of believers know the location of the Imam suggests that it may have been overlooked or, more likely, that it has been understood as applying to the time after the Qāʾīm’s appearance from *ghayba* and not before. On the Battle of Badr, see now, Athamina, “Badr,” *EI³* (online edition).

Qāʾim. A more likely explanation can be found in the Shiʿī sources themselves. Two significant hadiths mention the number 30 in the context of companions of the seventh Imam and the Prophet. According to the first report, al-Kāẓim disclosed to a group of 30 presumably elite followers that his son, ʿAlī (al-Riḍā), was his successor.221 More importantly, according to the second report, the day the Prophet died, it is said that there were precisely 30 companions by his side. This report features prominently in a work attributed to Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī (d. 76/695-6), a follower of ʿAlī from Kūfa.222

Commenting on the phrase, “the thirty are never lonely,” al-Majlīṣī states:

In other words (ay), (the Imam) is with 30 of his mawālī and elite followers (khawāṣṣihī). They never feel lonely for they keep each other company (laysa lahum waḥsha li-istinās baʿdihim bi-baʿdīh). On the other hand, [it could be that] (the Imam) is (himself) one of the 30 and thus never feels alone. A [third] possibility is that [the preposition] al-bāʾ[ in the phrase, wa-mā bi-thalāthin min waḥsha] denotes ‘with’ (maʿa) [rather than ‘in’], to mean that he never feels alone because he is with 30 [other people, though not necessarily his elite followers].

221 Al-Masʿūdī (attributed), Ithbāt al-vaṣīyya, 204.

222 Al-Hilālī, Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī, 794 > al-Majlīṣī, Biḥār al-anwār, 22:398. On al-Hilālī, see Djebli, “Sulaym b. Kays,” EI², 9:818-9. Serious doubts about the authenticity of this work have been raised by both Shiʿī and non-Shiʿī scholars; nonetheless, it has been cited by numerous Shiʿī scholars through the centuries. See Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnāʾ-ashariyya,” 532-3; Modarressi, Crisis and Consolidation, 101; Modarressi, Tradition and Survival, 82-6; al-Sayyārī, Revelation and Falsification, 243 (n. 567); and now, Amir-Moezzi, “Note Bibliographique sur le Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays, le plus ancien ouvrage shiʿite existant.”
It has also been said that this hadith means that (the Imam) is [always] in the appearance (haʾyat) of someone who is 30 years old for (at this age), a person [is old enough to] never feel lonely even if he is utterly remote [from everyone else] (wa-man kāna kadhālika lā yastawḥish fa-huwa fī ghāyat al-buʿd). In his comments on this hadith in his Biḥār al-anwār, al-Majlisi argues that “when one of the 30 dies, someone else takes his place” (in māta aḥaduhum qāma ākharu maqāmahū).

Elsewhere, in his Persian Ḥaqq al-yaqīn, he explicitly states that “during the ghayba, it is possible for some of the Shiʿa to attain (the Imam’s) presence.” To support this assertion, he alludes to the above hadith which according to him, affirms “that 30 of his elite [followers] (ṣī nafār az makhṣūsān) are perpetually in (the Imam’s) service. In other words (yaʾnī), when one [of these 30 followers] dies, another [follower] takes his place.”

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223 He is likely here referring to his teacher al-Māzandarānī’s opinion: “It has been said: it is possible that by this hadith is meant that he is always in the appearance of someone who is 30 years old for a person does not feel lonely at that age (wa-mā fī hādhā al-sinn min wahsha), but God knows best.” Al-Māzandarānī, Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī, 6:244.


225 Al-Majlisi, Biḥār al-anwār, 52:158 = Majlisi, Mahdī-i mawʿūd (trans. Davānī), 933. This view is also maintained by Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 2:854.

226 Majlisi, Ḥaqq al-yaqīn, 345-6. A similar interpretation is advanced by Muṣṭafavī, namely that 30 or 29 (if we include the Imam himself) of the Imam’s companions (āshāb) are with him during his ghayba, al-Kulaynī, Uṣūl al-kāfī (trans. Muṣṭafavī), 2:140 (no. 16).
Later sources state that the 30 are in fact a category of *awliyāʾ* (friends or initiates). Commenting on this hadith in his *Kitāb al-rajʿa*, Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī (d. 1241/1826) employs terminology common to descriptions of the Ṣūfī hierarchical order of *awliyāʾ* in stating that “thirty” refers to the 30 substitutes (*abdāl*) and chiefs (*nuqabāʾ*) that are in the company of the Hidden Imam. While he does not explicitly say so, it appears that he has in mind a hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir prophesying that some three hundred believers will take an oath of

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228 There are differences of opinion about the number of the *abdāl*. The Persian mystic ʿAlī al-Hujwirī (d. between 465/1072 and 469/1077) states they are 40 in number in his well-known Ṣūfī handbook (see Awn, “Sufism,” *ER*, 13:8821) while the famous Andalusian philosopher and mystic Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) states that there are only 7 *abdāl* in any given age (see I. Goldziher and H.J. Kissling, “Abdāl,” *EI*). On the infiltration of the term *abdāl* into later Shīʿī sources, see J. Chabbi, “Abdāl,” *Elr*, 1:173-4; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, 110-19; Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 72. On the position of the *nujabāʾ* and *nuqabāʾ* in later Shaykhi discourse, in particular, the writings of Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1871), see Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 66-7, 76; MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 24-5, 29.

229 The *nuqabāʾ* of the Hidden Imam are referred to in an early hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq and found in al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī*, 8:167 (no. 185) and appear to refer to an elite body of initiates: “[When he appears], the Qāʾīm will take out a book (*kitāb*<sup>m</sup>) which has been sealed with a golden seal (*makhtūm bi-khātam min dhahab*). He will tear off [the seal] and read from (this book) to the people. They will become startled and scatter away from him like frightened sheep. Only his *nuqabāʾ* will remain.” Cf. a slightly different version of this hadith in al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 610 (no 25) > al-Majlisi, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:326 (no. 42); al-Aḥsāʾī, *Sharḥ al-ziyāra*, 3:77.

allegiance to the Qa‘im when he appears at the Ka‘ba, among who will be nujabā’ from Egypt, 
abusul from Syria, and akhyār (outstanding people) from Iraq.231

Hasan Urūmiyyih-ī (d. after 1260/1844), who translated volume 13 of al-Majlisi’s 
Bihār al-anwār on the ghayba of the twelfth Imam into Persian, commented that “(the Imam’s) 
home during the days of ghayba is (in Medina),” adding that “it appears that the 30 people 
refers to the Men of the Unseen (rijāl al-ghayb) who are in the service of the Imam during the 
ghayba.”232

In interpreting this hadith, the scholar and Qur’an commentator Muḥammad 
Muḥammadī Ishtihārdī (d. 1385AS/2006) states that “besides his wife and children, a group of 
his friends who according to a hadith are 30 of his supports (awtād) and prominent disciples are

231 Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 477. A similar hadith ascribed to ‘Ali states that the nujabā’ are from Kūfa 
and the abdāl from Syria, al-Mufīd, al-Amālī, 31.

232 Majlisi, Mahdī-i maw‘ūd (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:748. The rijāl al-ghayb are another name for the 
abdāl. On this term in early Šūfī and Shi‘i sources labeled by the problematic appellation ghulāt, see 
Moosa, Extremist Shiites, 110-1. Ibn al-ʿArabi speaks frequently about the Men of the Unseen in his al- 
Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya as, for example, a class of spiritual beings who the Helpers of the Mahdī can see 
with their “penetrating vision…even when (the Men of the Unseen) want to be veiled and not to appear 
Ibn al-ʿArabī himself cites two personal experiences of encounters with such spiritual beings both of 
whom were strangers and one of whom was Persian, idem, 1:90-1, 271-2 (notes 119-21). Cf. the 
adoption of the term rijāl al-ghayb by leaders of the Shaykhi school to designate an occult spiritual 
always (hamvārīh) in his service.” Since this statement follows his discussion of the famous encounter story of ‘the Green Island in the White Sea’ (see footnote, chapter 4), it appears that the special friends Ishtihārdī has in mind here are the family and followers of the Imam who are said to reside on the Green Island with him.

**waḥsha.** “the thirty are never lonely”

Finally, the word *waḥsha* (defined in Arabic lexicons as loneliness; solitude; forlornness, desolateness and sadness arising from these states) is derived from *waḥsh* (pl. *wuḥūsh*), meaning wild beasts of the desert, which is how it is used in Quran 81:5, the only verse where we find a word from the *wāw-hāʾ-shīn* root. *Waḥsha* is the antonym of *uns* (companionship) and shares a common semantic property with *wahda* (loneliness), *khawf* (fear) and *hamm* (concern). As an example of its usage in classical Arabic literature, the lexicographer Ibn al-Zabidi provides the expression, *akhadhathu al-waḥsha*: “sadness arising from loneliness or solitude laid hold upon him.” In Arabic sources, *laylat al-waḥsha* (also called *laylat al-wahda*) is the first night after the burial of a loved one. In Shiʿī sources, the night of ‘Āshūrā (viz., the eve of 11 Muḥarram) is called *laylat al-waḥsha* since on this night, the plight of the

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233 Ishtihārdī, Ḥadrat-i Mahdi: Furūgh-i tābān-i wilāyat, 53.

captive survivors of Karbala who spent the night fearful in the desert is remembered and mourned. Moreover, *wahsha* is encountered in a significant Imāmī hadith ascribed to al-Riḍā about al-Khaḍir/al-Khiḍr’s relationship to the Hidden Imam (one cannot but notice the similarities with the hadiths presented in the previous chapter about the Qā’im’s appearance during pilgrimage):

Al-Khaḍir drank from the water of life and is alive. He will not die until {the Trumpet is blown} (Q 78:18). He comes and greets us. We hear his voice but do not see him. He is present whenever his name is mentioned (or remembered - *dhukira*). Whoever mentions him should greet him [for he is then present]. He attends the Pilgrimage, performs the rites, stands in vigil at Mount Arafat and says ‘amen’ to the prayers of the believers. Through him, God will keep our Qā’im company (*sa-yu’nis bihi wahshat qā’imina* [lit., through him, God will keep company the loneliness of our Qā’im]) during his *ghayba* and protect him from feeling lonely (*wa-yasil bihi wahdatahu*).

235 Muḥaddithī, *Mawsūʿat ʿĀshūrāʾ*, 392 (entry on *laylat al-wahsha*).

Commenting on the phrase, “the thirty are never lonely,” Jalālī maintains that “with the 30 people that are near him, (the Imam) prevents fear and worry to enter [his heart]” (bā sī tan kih dar kinār-i ʿuyand, bīm va harāsī bih khud rāh nimidahad).\(^{237}\)

2.2. HADITH 2: “[and] no one will know his location except the elite of his mawālī”

The second hadith that has been cited by some later scholars as proof of the possibility of contacting the Imam during the Greater Occultation (henceforth, Hadith 2) is, like Hadith 1, first encountered in al-Kulaynī’s Uṣūl al-kāfī:

\[\text{Muḥammad b. Yahyā}^{238} < \text{Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn}^{239} < \text{Ibn Mahbūb}^{240} < \text{Ishāq b. 'Ammār (al-Ṣayrafī)}^{241} < \text{al-Ṣādiq:} \]

\[\text{Muḥammad} \text{ b. Yahyā} \text{ b. al-Ḥusayn} \text{ b. Abī al-Khaṭṭāb al-Zayyāt (d. 262/876). On him, see Newman, } \text{Formative Period, index, s.v. ‘Muḥammad b. Yahyā al-‘Aṭṭār al-Ash'ārī al-Qummī.’} \]

\[\text{Muḥammad} \text{ b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī al-Khaṭṭāb al-Zayyāt (d. 262/876). On him, see Newman, } \text{Formative Period, 68; Modarressi, } \text{Tradition and Survival, index, s.v. ‘Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī l-Khaṭṭāb’} .\]

\[\text{Ḥasan b. Mahbūb al-Sarrād or al-Zarrād (d. 224/838-9), author of the work, } \text{Kitāb al-mashyakha on the subject of the ghayba (which has not survived) and considered trustworthy by authors of early Shi'ī rijāl works. See Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-'ashariyya,” 531-2; Kohlberg, } \text{A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work, 264; Takim, “The Rijāl of the Shi'ī Imāms as Depicted in Imāmī Biographical Literature,” 216; Husain, } \text{The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, 4, 6.} \]

\[\text{Abū Ya'qūb Ishāq b. 'Ammār b. Ḥayyān (d. circa 181/798), an important and trusted early hadith transmitter from al-Ṣādiq who is said to have at one point entertained doctrines that were deemed ‘extreme’ by later Imāmī Shi'a who of course liked to think of themselves as ‘moderate’ (for an insightful discussion about the problem of using the term ghulāt (lit. exaggerators) which I prefer to} \]
The Qāʾim will have two *ghaybas*. One of them will be short while the other will be long. During the first *ghayba*, no one will know his location except the elite of his Shi'a; while during the other, no one will know his location except the elite of his *mawāli*.²⁴²

Al-Nuʿmānī records the same hadith in his *al-Ghayba*, stating that he heard it directly from al-

Kulaynī, though in his work, the words, “in his faith” (*fī dīnihi*), are added to the end of the hadith’s *matn*.

location except the elite of his *mawālī* in his faith.243

Al-Nuʿmānī also cites a similar hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq:

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الْحَدِيثَانِ أَحْمَدُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ قَالَ حَدِيثًا عَلَيْهِ بْنُ الْحَسَنِ السَّمِّيْلِي عَنْ عُمَرَ بْنَ عُثمانَ عَنْ
الْحَسَنِ بْنِ مَحْبُوبٍ عَنْ إِسْحَاقَ بْنِ عَمَرٍ الصَّيْرَفَيْنِ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عُبْدِ اللَّهِ (عَ) يَقُولُ
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الْقَائِمِ غَيْبَاتَانِ إِحْدَاهُما طَوِيلَةٌ وَاِلَخُرى قَصِيرَةٌ فَالْأَوْلِى يَعْلَمُ بِمِكَانِهِ فِيهَا خَاصَةً مِنْ شَيْعَتِهِ وَاِلَخُرى لاَ يَعْلَمُ بِمِكَانِهِ فِيهَا إِلَّا خَاصَةً مِثْلَهَا فِي دِينِهِ
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The Qāʾim will have two *ghaybas*. One of them will be long while the other will be short. During the first, [only] the most elite of his Shiʿa will know his location, while during the other, no one will know his location except the elite of his *mawālī* in his faith.246

Al-Ḥalabī has cited a similar hadith on the authority of Ishāq b. ‘Ammār with two noticeable differences: 1) His version does not contain the second part of the hadith and 2) the

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term *awliyāʾ* is used as opposed to Shīʿa or *mawālī*: “The Qāʾim will have two *ghaybas*, one short and the other long. As for the first one, his place will be known, especially to his friends/initiates” (*yuʿlam makānuh khāṣṣatun li-awliyāʾih*).

Curiously, the two versions of this hadith cited by al-Majlīsī in *Biḥār al-anwār* are markedly different. One version reads, “The Qāʾim will have two *ghaybas*. One of them will be short while the other will be long. During the first *ghayba*, no one will know his location except the elite of his *mawālī*. Here, there is no mention of whether anyone will know the Imam’s location and be able to contact him during the second or Greater Occultation.

The second version of the hadith recorded by al-Majlīsī is even more surprising. Here, the preposition *illā* is left out, generating a radically different meaning: “The Qāʾim will have two *ghaybas*. One of them will be long while the other will be short. During the first *ghayba*, [only] the most privileged of his Shīʿa will know his location, while during the other, not even the elite of his *mawālī* in his *dīn* will know his location.”

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249 Al-Majlīsī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:155 (no. 10). The editors of the most recent edition of *Biḥār al-anwār* have ‘corrected’ this anomaly by placing the word *illā* back into the hadith in brackets and referencing
Hadith 2: Commentary

Like Hadith 1, Hadith 2 is also of Wāqīfī origin. Although none of the names mentioned in the isnād are identified as Wāqīfī in rijāl works, at least one, namely al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb transmitted numerous hadiths from the Wāqīfī ʿAlī b. Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭāʿinī250 and consequently, al-Ṭūsī called his authority into question.251 Moreover, Hadith 2 is clearly modeled after a different Wāqīfī Tradition that has been preserved by al-Ṭūsī: “Abū al-Ḥasan [i.e., Mūsā al-Kāẓim] will have two ghaybas. One of them will be short and the other will be long” (iḥdāhumā taqill wa-l-ukhrā taṭūl).252

the published edition of al-Nuʿmānī’s al-Ghayba, but it is entirely possible that al-Majlisi relied on an earlier manuscript of al-Nuʿmānī’s al-Ghayba that has not survived to our time. It merits noting that in the two published Persian translations of al-Majlisi’s work, both translators rendered the hadith the way it was preserved by al-Majlisi without observing any problems. Thus, Urūmiyyih-ʾī translates the last part of the hadith as, “In the short ghayba, the elite (khāṣṣān) of [his] Shīʿa know his location while in the other, not even the elite are aware [of his location],” Majlisi, Mahdī-i mawʿūd (trans. Urūmiyyih-ʾī), 1:750. Davānī’s translation is similar: “During the first (short) ghayba, the elite of his Shīʿa know his location; but during the second (long) ghayba, not even his special friends (dūstān-i makhṣūs-i ā) know where he is,” Majlisi, Mahdi-i mawʿūd (trans. Davānī), 930.

250 See for examples, al-Ṭūsi, al-Amālī, 216 (no. 380); al-Ṭūsi, Kitāb al-ghayba, 435; al-Majlisi, Bihār al-anwār, 23:4 (no. 81); 52:214 (no. 69); 52:354 (no. 115).


252 Al-Ṭūsi, Kitāb al-ghayba, 57; Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʾashariyya,” 532 (note 78); Klemm, “Die vier sufaraʿ des Zwölften Imam Zur formativen Periode der Zwölferšīʿa,” 142.
From reading Hadith 2 (the version found in al-Nuʿmānī, not al-Kulaynī) as stating that “the first ghayba will...be the longer one,” Kohlberg has argued that “the impression gained from the discrepancy between the description of the respective lengths of the first and second ghaybas is that initially it was not quite clear which of the two would last longer.” However, there in fact is no discrepancy. Hadith 2 states that one of the two ghaybas will be longer though not necessarily the first. Moreover, elsewhere in al-Nuʿmānī’s al-Ghayba, where this version of Hadith 2 is first cited, in a passage that Kohlberg appears to have missed, al-Nuʿmānī is adamant that “the short ghayba” (al-ghayba al-qasīra) has ended and that he is writing during the long (what came to be known later as the Greater) ghayba (see chapter 3).

Of particular importance is the meaning of the word khāṣṣa in Hadith 2. In early Imāmī sources, the Shīʿa were often called al-khāṣṣa (‘the elect’) while the non-Shīʿa (and especially the Sunnis) were disparagingly labeled al-ʿāmma (‘the usual run of men’). However, in early

253 Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿAshariyya,” 528. The same reading of this Tradition is found in Momen, An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam, 75.

254 Kohlberg, “ʿĂmma,” Elr, 1:976-7; Kohlberg, Belief and Law in Imāmī Shiʿism, 8; M.A.J. Beg, “al-Khaṣṣa waʾl-ʿĂmma,” EI²; Floor, “Kāṣṣa,” Elr, 16:106-12. On the terms khāṣṣa and ʿāmma, see also Mahdīpūr, “Khāṣṣah vaʾ ʿĂmmah,” DII (online edition). In one of the accounts of an encounter with the Hidden Imam from the Lesser Occultation, the Imam tells ʿAli b. Ibrāhīm Mahdīyār (on him, see chapter 3) that were it not for the repentance of some of the Shīʿa, everyone on earth would be killed “except the elite few of (his) Shīʿa whose words do not differ from their deeds” (illā khawāṣṣ al-shiʿa alladhīna...
works such as al-Ṣaffār al-Qummi’s (d. 290/903) Baṣāʾir al-darajāt, the early Shiʿi community is itself divided into two circles. The majority of the Shiʿa constituted al-ʿāmma while a prestigious minority or inner circle made up al-khāṣṣa, a qualified spiritual elite who were initiated into secret knowledge and esoteric doctrine that was kept from al-ʿāmma and who were charged with “la garde du secret,” to quote Amir-Moezzi’s translation for taqiyya.  

According to a report found in Ithbāt al-waṣiyya, the tenth Imam concealed himself from all but a handful of his elite Shiʿa (ʿadad yasīr min khawāṣṣihī), while Ḥasan al-ʿAskari would speak with his elite followers and others from behind a veil. It is said that they did this to prepare the believers for the ghayba of the Qāʾim so that they would not reject the ghayba and that concealment would become routine for them. Our translation of khāṣṣa as “elite believers,” follows Amir-Moezzi, who renders khāṣṣa as “l’élite des croyants,” while arguing that the expression khāṣṣat shīʿatihi “désigne sans doute les quatre ‘représentants’

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Amir-Moezzi, Le Guide divin, 221. See also Friedman, The Nuṣayri-ʿAlawīs, 185.

(nāʾib/wakil/safīr) de l’imam cache pendant l’Occultation mineure,” since according to tradition, they alone knew the location of the Imam. However, it should be pointed out Amir-Moezzi here is expressing a much later interpretation of Hadith 2 since, as mentioned earlier, the institution of sitāra is not alluded to in any of the works that have survived from the Lesser Occultation.

As Hadith 1 and Hadith 2 are recorded in al-Kulaynī’s Uṣūl al-kāfī (unlike Hadith 3 below), it would be appropriate to discuss here a commentary on al-Kāfī that has not yet been mentioned: the renowned Safavid philosopher Mullā Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shirāzī’s (Mullā Ṣadrā) (d. ca. 1045/1635-6) highly philosophical though incomplete Sharḥ usūl al-kāfī. While a rigorous


259 On Ṣadrā, see Rahman, “Mullā Ṣadrā,” ER, 9:6231-4, though he does not mention Ṣadrā’s commentary on the Uṣūl; Rizvi, “Mollā Ṣadrā Širāzī,” Elr (online edition); Rizvi, “Reconsidering the Life of Mullā Ṣadrā Shirāzī (d. 1641),” 181-201. His Sharḥ usūl al-Kāfī was one of his final works, written, as pointed out by Rustom, “Qur’anic Exegesis in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā’s Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiha,” 115 (now published as Rustom, The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mulla Ṣadrā), after he had completed his commentaries on various suras of the Qur’an. Another important philosophical commentary on al-Kāfī by Muḥammad al-Bāqir Mir Dāmād (d. 1040/1630), al-Rawāshiḥ al-samāwiyya fi sharḥ aḥadīth al-imāmiyya, does not contain any comments on the hadiths about the ghayba.
analysis of Ṣadrā’s views on the Hidden Imam is beyond the scope of this study, some brief notes about his comments on these hadiths may be registered: Although Ṣadrā chose not to directly gloss Hadith 1 and Hadith 2, he argued in the chapter of his work concerning hadiths about the Qāʾim and his ghayba that the Qāʾim has been named al-qāʾīm “because he exists (mawjūd)…never becomes weak or ill, never grows old, and will never be forgotten…rather, he lives and will die in accordance with the will of God.” Ṣadrā here appears to be reading qāʾīm in a sense that is closer to the meaning of the divine name, qayyūm (everlasting or self-subsisting; cf. Qur’an 2:255). He then contends, in a possible echo of his signature philosophical principle of substantial/essential motion/change (al-haraka al-jawhariyya), that “the substance/essence of (the Qāʾim’s) spirit is not separate from [his] body (laysa anna jawhar rūḥihi mufāraqʿ ʿan al-jasad); rather, he is [constantly] eating, drinking, talking, moving, resting, walking, sitting and writing.” In other words, the Qāʾim is not essentially stable but rather, like the rest of reality, is undergoing flux and being ceaselessly renewed by God.

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Specifically concerning the *ghayba* of the Imam, Ṣadrā maintains that “the nature (*kayfiyya*) of (the Hidden Imam) being alive and existing on earth is the same as the nature of Jesus being alive and existing in heaven. Anyone who rejects the fact that the Mahdī exists today or thinks that it is inconceivable that he could live so long suffers from deficient knowledge, weak faith and inadequate awareness of the nature [of the *ghayba*].”\(^{261}\) Elsewhere, he states that “in investigating the reality of this matter and others like it, we have pursued a fastidious methodology and meticulous approach. This is not the place to go into the details (*wa-lanā fī tahqīq, hādhā al-marrām wa-amthālih, maslakī aniqī wa-manhajī daqiqī laysa hāhunā mawdī ṭashihi*), but briefly, we have alluded to it earlier in saying that the quiddity of his existence and his being alive in the realm of the earth (*ʿālam al-ard*) is the same as Jesus existing and being alive in heaven.” It is not difficult to come away from this passage with the impression that Ṣadrā is not speaking about the physical earth and sky. In fact, immediately following this comment, Ṣadrā integrates a passage from Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, without an introduction or any indication that he is citing from that work, about “the

\(^{261}\) Shirāzī, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfī*, 1:558. Ṣadrā then cites, approvingly we are to presume, via his teacher, al-Shaykh al-Bahāʾī, a lengthy passage from the challenging chapter 366 of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* concerning the Mahdī and his helpers without any further comments of his own. See also Ṣadrā’s compiled Qurʾan commentary where he affirms the doctrine of the Return (*al-rajʿā*) to take place at the time of the appearance of the Qāʾim, al-Shirāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm*, 5:76.
earth of worship” *(arḍ al-ʿibāda)* suggesting that this is what he means by the “realm of the earth” as the abode of the Hidden Imam.²⁶² Needless to say, Ṣadrā’s interpretation, like his entire philosophical system, is highly original, although the influence of Ibn al-ʿArabī here as elsewhere is discernible. It also merits pointing out that at a time when stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam were being recorded and compiled, Ṣadrā’s works do not contain any references to the issue, in contrast, for example, to his student al-Kāshānī. Likewise, Ṣadrā chose not to directly comment on any of the reports found in al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī* about believers who had seen the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation.

**2.3. HADITH 3: “except the *mawlā* who is in charge of his affairs”**

The third and final hadith (henceforth Hadith 3) invoked by some Shiʿī scholars to make the case for encounters with the Imam is ascribed to al-Ṣādiq and transmitted on the authority of his well-known disciple, al-Mufaḍdal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī (*fl.* late 2nd/8th cent., d. before 179/795-6).²⁶³ This hadith is not found in any of the Shiʿī works that have survived from the


²⁶³ Mufaḍdal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī, an agent of al-Ṣādiq and hadith transmitter from both al-Ṣādiq and al-Kāẓim who according to some later sources briefly preached certain antinomian ideas that al-Ṣādiq disapproved. On him, see Halm, “Das „Buch der Schatten“ [I],” 224-36 and *passim*, Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis*, 214-7; Madelung, “Khaṭṭābiyya,” *EI*²; Sachedina, *Islamic messianism*, 215 (n. 27); Sachedina, “The Significance of Kashshi’s *Riǧāl* in Understanding the Early Role of the Shiʿite *Fuqahāʾ*,” 194; Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, index, s.v. ‘Mufaḍdal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī’; Bar-
Lesser Occultation. In fact, the earliest extant work in which it appears is al-Nuʿmānī’s *Ghayba*. Two other versions are cited in al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-ghayba* (henceforth, al-Ṭūsī (1) and al-Ṭūsī (2)). For ease of comparison, all three hadiths are presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>من كتاب الغيبة للطوسي 1</th>
<th>من كتاب الغيبة للطوسي 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>أَخَذْنَا أَحْمَدًا بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ بْنِ سَعْيَدٍ بْنِ إِدْرِيسٍ عَنْ عَلِيٍّ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ عَنْ مَعْنِيَةِ بْنِ الْمُسْتَنِيرِ</td>
<td>أَخْذَهُمَا أَخْذَهُمَا عَلَى أَمْرِهِ بِأَنَّهُمَا أَطْوَلُ مِنَ الْآخَرَى حَتَّى يَقُولُنَّ بَعْضُهُمْ يأْتُونَ قَالَ مَعْنِيَةُ بْنِ الْمُسْتَنِيرُ بْنِ إِدْرِيسٍ عَنْ عَلِيٍّ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ عَنْ مَعْنِيَةِ بْنِ الْمُسْتَنِيرِ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

al-Ṭūsī (2): “The master of this amr will have two ghaybas.

One of them will last longer than the other until some say that he has died and others say that he was killed.

No one will remain [faithful] to his amr except a small group of his companions. No one will know his location or have any knowledge about his amr or anything else [related to him] except the mawlā who is in charge of his affairs.”

al-Ṭūsī (1): “The master of this amr will have two ghaybas.

One of them will last until some say that he has died and others say that he was killed, and still others that he has left [and will not return].

[It will last] until none of his companions are left [faithful] to his amr except a small group. None of his children or anyone else will know his location except the mawlā who is in charge of his affairs.”

al-Nuʿmānī: “The master of this amr will have two ghaybas.

One of them will last until some say that he has died and others say that he was killed, and still others that he has left [and will not return].

None of his companions will be remain [faithful] to his amr except a small group. None of his friends or anyone else will know his location except the mawlā who is in charge of his affairs.”

264 Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 61 (no. 60).

265 Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 161-2 (no. 120); al-Nīlī, Muntakhab al-anwār al-mudī’a, 155; al-ʿĀmilī, Ithbāt al-hudā, 5:118 (no. 279); al-Majlisī, Biḥār al-anwār, 52:152-3 (no. 5); al-Nūrī, Jannat al-maʾwā, 152; al-Shaftī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 2:304 (no. 238).

266 Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 176 (no. 5) > al-Shaftī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 2:302 (no. 232). Partial translation in Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿashariyya,” 528. Al-Nuʿmānī states that if he transmitted this hadith and no other to prove the ghayba of the Imam, it would suffice: wa-law lam yakun yurwā fī al-ghayba illā hādhā al-ḥadīth la-kāna fīhi kitāya li-man taʾammalahu.
The *matn* of the hadith as recorded by al-Nuʿmānī is older and appears to be more reliable than al-Ṭūsī (1) leading scholars to conclude that the hadith was corrupted (*muḥarrat*) as al-Nuʿmānī narrated it without mentioning any children for the Imam.\(^{267}\)

As first observed by Madelung, this Tradition, like others that specify two *ghaybas* for the Qāʾim, is undoubtedly of *Wāqifī* origin.\(^ {268}\) ʿAbd Allāh b. Jabala (d. 210/834) of Kūfa mentioned in the *isnād* wrote a work to prove the *ghayba* of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and is widely recognized as a *Wāqifī* in the early *rijāl* works.\(^ {269}\) Though al-Ṭūsī cites it, he felt obliged to respond to the challenge that the hadith was of *Wāqifī* origin. He comments that this report makes clear that the Qāʾim will have two *ghaybas*. During the first or lesser *ghayba*, information about the Imam was accessible to the faithful. However, during the second *ghayba*, news about him (*akhbāruhu*) has been cut off, his written communications (*mukātabātuhu*), i.e., his *tawqīʿāt*, have ceased and no one has any information about him except one special person,

\(^{267}\) Al-Tustari, *al-Akhbār al-dakhila*, 150. This point is likewise made by Luṭf Allāh Gulpāyigānī (b. 1918), *Pāsukh-i dah pursish*, 54, in arguing that it is not possible to know with certainty whether or not the Hidden Imam has a wife and children.

\(^{268}\) Madelung, “al-Mahdi,” *EI²*, 5:1236. Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, 57 (no. 52), preserves a hadith stating explicitly that al-Kāẓim will have “two *ghaybas*.”

a reference to the *mawlā*. Al-Ṭūsī argues that this was not the case with the *ghayba* of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and therefore this hadith was not applicable to him.\(^{270}\)

### 2.4. *al-Mawlā* / *al-Mawālī*

From Hadith 2 and Hadith 3 we learn that during the *ghayba* of the Imam, and in particular during the second or longer *ghayba*, none of his family, nor any of his Shi’a or any of his *awliyā’* will know his location and be able to contact him. The only person/people that will be able to reach him are the elite of his *mawālī* (according to Hadith 2) or simply the *mawlā* who is in responsible for his affairs (according to Hadith 3) which raises the question: who is/are the *mawlā/mawālī*?

*Mawlā* (pl. *mawālī*), a polysemic word from the root *waw-lām-yā’* with a notoriously expansive semantic field, is undoubtedly the most ambiguous term in the above hadiths. *Al-mawlā* can be rendered as protector, friend, patron, lord or chief; kinsman or relative; freedman or client (in the sense of being under the patronage of a manumitter); or servant.\(^{271}\) The term

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has a rich history in Shi'i sources and most immediately conjures the cryptic and perhaps most contentious words the Prophet is said to have worded during his Farewell Pilgrimage at Ghadir Khumm, words which for centuries have been the subject of intense debate among Sunnī and Shi'i scholars: “For whomever I am their mawlā, ‘Alī is [also] their mawlā.”

\[Mawlā = \text{God}\]

Some Shi'i scholars have curiously interpreted \textit{al-mawlā} in Hadith 3 as referring to God. Hasan Urūmiyyih-ī (d. after 1260/1844) appears to have been the first to posit this interpretation by rendering \textit{illā al-mawlā alladhī yalī amrahu} as “except Providence who directs his affairs” \textit{(magar parvardigārī kih mudabbīr-i umūr-i āst)} in his Persian translation of volume 13 of al-Majlisī’s \textit{Biḥār al-anwār}. More than a century later, ‘Alī Davānī (d. 1427/2007) was even less oblique in his updated translation of the same volume, completed in 1339AS/1960: “except for God who determines when, where and how (the Imam) will appear” \textit{(juz khudāvandi kih}
More recently, Muḥammad Sipihrī advanced the same interpretation: “No one, not even his children, knows (the Imam’s) location except God who has (the Imam’s) affairs in His hands” (magar khudāyī kih ikhityār-i ū rā dar dast dārad). This reading of al-mawlā as God is a very late development and though textually tenable, it implies that no human being knows where the Imam is during the Greater Occultation and would presumably negate the possibility of any person ever contacting or seeing him, a position that none of the three scholars mentioned earlier would agree with since all three have approvingly translated many of these accounts.

*Mawlā = Friend*

A more likely interpretation is reading mawlā as friend (close to one of the meanings of wali) or initiate. The term is certainly used in this sense in some early sources. For instance, a hadith ascribed to al-Kāẓim classifies humanity into “three kinds of people (al-nās‘ thalāthat): the true genuine Arab, the mawlā and the uncouth. We [i.e., the Imams] are the true, genuine Arabs; the mawlā is he who befriends/loves/is loyal us (fā-man wālānā); and the uncouth is

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276 Cf. additional sentence added to the hadith of Ghadir Khumm in some versions: “O God, befriend him who befriends (ʿAlī), be an enemy to him who is enemy to him!” (Allāhumma wāl, man wālāhu
he who disassociates himself from us and is openly hostile towards us.”

It is said that the tenth Imam appointed his son as the next Imam in the presence of “a group of mawālī,” here meaning close followers and friends. And a Tradition ascribed to al-Ḥusayn states that the mawālī are “from us” (wa-hum minnā), which to cite Amir-Moezzi, “probablement qu'ils sont formés de la même substance que nous.”

The greatest proponent of this interpretation has been the aforementioned scholar, Amir-Moezzi. He contends that taken together, Hadith 2 and Hadith 3 “appear to suggest” that the faithful believers in the Imam remain in contact with him throughout the Greater Occultation. In his works, Amir-Moezzi translates khāṣṣat mawālīhi in Hadith 2 as “les élus parmi ses Amis

277 Al-Ṣadūq, Maʿānī al-akhbār, 403 (no. 70). For discussion and a different translation, see Amir-Moezzi, “Seul l’Homme de Dieu est Humain,” 194, 201-2. Similar hadiths are found in al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī that present the trinary without the word mawlā or other derivatives of walāya, e.g., “There are three categories of people: the possessor of knowledge, the seeker of knowledge, and the flotsam (ghuthāʾ). We [i.e., the Imams] are the possessors of knowledge, our Shi’a are the seekers of knowledge, and the rest of the people are flotsam.” Al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 1:34 (no. 4).

278 Al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 1:325 (no. 2).

279 Al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 8:244-5 (no. 339).

intimes” (the chosen ones among his intimate Friends)\textsuperscript{281} and “les élus parmi ses Amis fidèles”\textsuperscript{282} / “les élus parmi ses fidèles Amis”\textsuperscript{283} (the chosen ones among his faithful Friends).

According to him, \textit{khāṣṣat mawālīhi} refers to “les fidèles particulièrement initiés pour pouvoir être en contact avec l’imâm caché pendant l’Occultation majeure.”\textsuperscript{284}

Amir-Moezzi’s translation of Hadith 3 as it appears in al-Nu‘mānī is peculiar: “Seuls quelques-uns parmi ses fidèles resteront acquis à sa Cause et nul, parmi les amis ou autres, ne connaîtra l’endroit [\textit{wali}] où il se trouve, hormis l’Ami intime qui régit sa Cause [\textit{al-mawlā al-ladhi yali amrahu}].”\textsuperscript{285} As correctly observed by Amir-Moezzi, “une distinction inhabituelle” is being made in this tradition between the \textit{wali}, which he translates in the case of this hadith as “ami,” and the \textit{mawlā}, which he translates as “ami intime,” to establish a hierarchy among the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{281} Amir-Moezzi, \textit{Le Guide divin}, 327. \\
\textsuperscript{282} Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 133. \\
\textsuperscript{283} Amir-Moezzi, “Fin du Temps,” 62. \\
\end{flushright}
believers. But it is not clear what he intends by reading *mawlā* as the intimate friend of the Imam who “rules over” (régit) his Cause unless by friend here is meant God which is clearly not the case. The phrase *yalī amrahu* may be understood to mean ‘he who protects/guards his *amr*’ or ‘he who holds command or authority over his *amr*’ but as Ibn Manẓūr points out, to *yalī an amr* or to be the *wālī* of an *amr* is also to take an affair or matter upon oneself, i.e. to undertake something, which is the reading that most scholars have preferred (see below).

Based on his interpretation, Amir-Moezzi suggests that the “les mystiques imâmites n’ont pas cessé de declarer” that the friends of the Imam are a small minority of faithful believers who “discover the Light of the Imam in their hearts and thus attain esoteric Knowledge [sic] and miraculous powers” and come to “know ‘the location of the hidden imam’,” but who are “able to hide their privilege from the eyes of the world, so that the conditions set up by the hidden imam in his last letter may [declaring anyone who has seen him a lying impostor] be respected.”


This reading is reflected in some 19th century sources and developed most fully in the
writings of the Shaykhī masters but it would be anachronistic if not forced to read this
interpretation back into the early sources.\textsuperscript{290} In fact, other than certain works of Āḥmad al-
Āḥsāʾī, this reading is encountered in the works of only three other Shīʿī writers, all of which
date from the 19th century onward: 1) Urūmiyyih-ʾī rendered \textit{khāṣṣat mawālihi} as “his special
friends” \textit{(khāṣṣān-i düstanash)}\textsuperscript{291}; 2) Amīnī (b. 1304AS/1925) likewise interpreted \textit{khāṣṣat
mawālihi} as the elite of the Imam’s friends \textit{(khawāṣṣ-i düstān)}\textsuperscript{292}; 3) Finally, in his translation
of al-Nuʿmāni’s \textit{Kitāb al-ghayba}, Ghaffārī translated the phrase as “his servants or his special
friends” \textit{(khidmatkārān va yā düstān-i khāṣṣ-i ū)}\textsuperscript{293} in one place and “the elite friends-servants
of (the Imam) who are firm in his \textit{dīn}” \textit{(düstān-i khidmatguzār-i khāṣṣ-i ānḥaḍrat kih bar dīn-i
ū hastand)} in another.\textsuperscript{294}

\textit{Mawlā = Servant}

\textsuperscript{290} On the Shaykhī hermeneutics of the \textit{ghayba}, see Corbin, \textit{En Islam iranien}, 4:205-300 \textit{passim} and in
particular, 274-86 and 286-91; Amir-Moezzi, “Une absence remplie de présences. Herméneutiques de
l’occultation chez les Shaykhiyya.”

\textsuperscript{291} Majlisī, \textit{Mahdī-i mawʿūd} (trans. Urūmiyyih-ʾī), 1:751.

\textsuperscript{292} Amīnī, \textit{Dādgustar-i jahān}, 131.

\textsuperscript{293} Al-Nuʿmāni, \textit{Matn va tarjamah-yi ghaybat-i Nuʿmānī} (trans. Ghaffārī), 249.

\textsuperscript{294} Al-Nuʿmāni, \textit{Matn va tarjamah-yi ghaybat-i Nuʿmānī} (trans. Ghaffārī), 250.
A more tenable reading is to understand mawlā in this hadith as denoting servant, similar in meaning to the word khādim (coll. khadam, pl. khuddām).\(^{295}\) It is common knowledge that the Prophet and all of the Imams possessed male servants, from Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/712) who entered Muhammad’s service as a youth,\(^{296}\) to Abū al-Sha‘thā’ Qanbar b. Kādān al-Dawsī, ʿAlī’s famous mawlā and groom,\(^{297}\) to the many servants and attendants of the Ḥasan al-ʿAskari.\(^{298}\) The will and testament of Mūsā al-Kāẓim preserved by al-Kulaynī states in part that he bequeathed his “charities (ṣadaqāt), properties (amwāl) and servants (mawālī)” to his son.\(^{299}\)

Shaykh al-Mufid appears to have had the above hadiths in mind when he maintained that during the second or longer ghayba, not even the Imam’s most elite votaries know his

\(^{295}\) Wensinck, “Khādim,” \textit{EI}², 4:899.


\(^{297}\) He is designated in Imāmi Shi‘i sources as a mawlā, khādim and ghulām of ʿAlī from Kūfa and stories of his unwavering loyalty to ʿAlī and ʿAlī’s deep affection for him are plentiful. See, e.g., al-Majlisi 42:121-140 (bāb 122: \\textit{ahwāl Rashīd al-Hijrī wa-Maytham al-Tammār wa-Qanbar}). There is surprisingly little about him in western sources. See Friedlaender, “The Heterodoxies of the Shiites in the Presentation of Ibn Ḥazm,” 99-100; Rajkowsi, “Early Shi‘ism in Iraq,” 120 (note 2); Anthony, \textit{The Caliph and the Heretic}, 171-2 (note 62). Several of his descendants were hadith transmitters, e.g. Kathir al-Qanbari. See Modarressi, \textit{Tradition and Survival}, 309. He is also features prominently in an early Nuṣayrī source as “the bāb of revelation.” See Bar-Asher and Kofsky, “A Tenth-Century Nuṣayrī Treatise on the Duty to Know the Mystery of the Divinity,” esp. 244-9.

\(^{298}\) Al-Kulaynī, \textit{al-Kāfī}, 1:329 (no. 6).

\(^{299}\) Al-Kulaynī, \textit{al-Kāfī}, 1:316 (no. 15).
location or are able to reach him. This is because “the only people who know his location during the longer (ghayba) are those from among his most trustworthy friends/initiates who have been entrusted with the task of serving him (man tawallā khidmatahu min thuqāt awliyāʾihi) and who do nothing else but tend to his [daily] needs (lam yanqaṭiʿ anhu ilā al-ishtighāl bi-ghayrihi).” In other words, the mawālī are the Imam’s servants.

In fact, the overwhelming majority of Shīʿī scholars who have commented on these hadiths have interpreted mawlā and mawālī as a servant or servants who tends to the everyday needs of the Imam, using an Arabic or Persian derivative of the khāʾ-ḍāl-ḥāʾ root and on rare occasion, in the case of Persian translators and commentators, the word ghulām. Commenting on the version of Hadith 2 found in al-Kāfī, al-Kāshānī speculated that “it seems that by khāṣṣat al-mawālī is meant those who serve (the Hidden Imam)” (ka-annahu yurīd bi-khāṣṣat al-mawālī alladhīna yakhdimūnahu). He then echoed a previous statement mentioned earlier:

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300 Al-Mufīd, al-Masāʾil al-ʿashar fī al-ghayba, 76.

301 The word ghulām is of Arabic origin and denotes “either a servant, sometimes elderly and very often, but not necessarily a slave servant; or a bodyguard, slave or freedman, bound to his master by personal ties,” D. Sourdel, et al. “Ghulām,” EI², 2:1079-1091; Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 2286-7. The word has a rich history in Arabic literature beginning with the Qurʾan where the following are referred to as ghulām: Ismāʿīl (15:53; 37:101); the unnamed youth killed by the companion of Moses (18:74, 80); the two orphaned owners of the wall that the companion of Moses repaired (18:82); John the Baptist (3:40, 19:7-8); Jesus (19:19-20); the young men who serve the denizens of Paradise (52:24);
“because there is no way for the rest of the Shīʿa to reach him during (the Greater Occultation)” (li-anna sāʾir al-shīʿat laysa lahum fīhā ilayhi sabīl”). According to al-Majlisi, the khāṣṣat al-mawālī are the Imam’s “servants (khadamahu), family members and children or the 30 who have already been mentioned [in his commentary on Hadith 1].” Nūrī rendered illā al-mawlā alladhī yali amrahu as “except for the one who is busy serving [the Imam] and tending to his needs” (magar ānkhī mashghūl-i khidmat va mutavalli-i umūr-i ūst). Scholars from the twentieth century have advanced the same interpretation. In his exposition of the doctrines of Shīʿī Islam, Mujtabā Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī (d. 1386/1967) translated illā al-mawlā alladhī yali amrahu as “except the one who serves (the Imam)” (magar... and Joseph (12:19), the ghulām par excellence in Islamic sources. In Persian, the loan word ghulām denotes a young male servant or slave, Dihkhudā, Lughatnāmah (online edition), s.v. ‘ghulām.’

302 Al-Kāshānī, al-Wāfī, 2:414. The same explanation is repeated by al-Kāshānī in his al-Shāfī fī al-ʿaqāʾid wa-l-akhlāq wa-l-ḥkām, 332.


304 Nūrī, Najm-i thāqīb, 2:861.

305 A renowned 20th century scholar and the teacher of such prominent contemporary ulama as ʿAlī Sistānī (b. 1349/1930) and Abū al-Qāsim Khazʿali (b. 1304AS/1925) (on whom, see the General Conclusion).
ān-kih ā rā khidmat minamāyad). Amīnī understood the phrase as “his special servant” (khidmatkār-i makhṣūsash), while Ayatollah Yad Allāh al-Dūzdūzānī (b. 1935) interpreted al-mawlā as “those who support his amr. These are [his] servants and no one else” (wa-hum al-khadama wa-lā yashmal ghayr al-khadama).

Muḥammad Javād Ghaffārī, the Persian translator of al-Nuʿmānī’s al-Ghayba, rendered the final part of the hadith as, “except for the servant who tends to his needs” (magar hamān khidmatguzārī kih bikār-hā-yi ā mīrisad). Ghaffārī’s translation is similar to a more recent translation by ʿAlī-Akbar Dhākirī: “except for the servant who takes care of his affairs” (magar khādimī kih kārhā-yi īshān rā anjām midihad). Kamrahʾī rendered khāṣṣat mawālīhi as “his initiated servants” (khādimīn-i maḥram-i ā), while Bihbūdī translated the locution as “his

308 Al-Dūzdūzānī, Taḥqīq latif, 91.
309 Al-Nuʿmānī, Matn va tarjamah-yi ghaybat-i Nuʿmānī (trans. Ghaffārī), 251. See also idem, 259, where al-mawlā is translated as “special servant” (khidmatkār-i makhṣūs). A similar translation is offered by Yaʿqūbī, “Nigāhī bih tavallud,” 353: “except the person who is in charge of his affairs” (juz ān kasī kih umūr-i vay rā pay migirad).
special servants” (ghālimān-i makhšūs-i āū). 312 Ahmad Fahri-Zanjānī translated mawālī in connection with these hadiths as servants (nawkarān). 313 Alīpūr citing this hadith as proof that meeting the Imam is possible, translates khāṣṣat mawālīhi as “the elite servants” (khidmatkārān-i khāṣhs) 314 who he argues are “special individuals” (afrād-i khāṣss) 315 that have seen and recognized the Imam.

Muḥammad Rāzī who translated al-Ṭūsī’s Kitāb al-ghayba into Persian rendered the phrase in al-Ṭūsī (1) as “except for the servant who tends to his needs” (magar ghulāmī-kih mutavalli-i amr-i ā mīshavād), 316 and al-Ṭūsī (2) as “except that servant who will oversee his affairs” (magar ān ghulāmikih mubāshir-i kār-i āst). 317 ʿAbbās Jalālī, who recently retranslated al-Ṭūsī’s Kitāb al-ghayba into Persian followed suit, translating the phrase in al-Ṭūsī (1) as “except the servant who has assumed responsibility for his affairs” (juz ghulāmī kih umūr-i


314 Alīpūr, Jilvah-hā-yi pinhānī, 110.

315 Alīpūr, Jilvah-hā-yi pinhānī, 113.

316 Al-Ṭūsī, Tuḥfah-yi qudsī (trans. Rāzī), 51.

317 Al-Ṭūsī, Tuḥfah-yi qudsī (trans. Rāzī), 135 (no. 6).
marbūṭ bih ʿū rā bar ʿuhdah mīgīrad),\(^{318}\) and al-Ṭūsī (2) as “except for the servant who is responsible for his affairs” (*magar ghulāmī kih ʿuhdīhār-i kārhā-yi ʿū mīshavād*).\(^{319}\) This reading is affirmed by Javād Muʿallim who alluding to Hadith 1 states “the Imam’s servants are some 30 people who not only see the Imam whenever they wish but are in fact always in his service (*hamīshīh dar khidmat-i ḥādratand*).”\(^{320}\)

Three western scholars have advanced the same interpretation. Sachedina and Klemm translated *khāṣṣat al-mawālīhi* as “(the Imam’s) special slaves”\(^{321}\) and “the chosen ones from among (the Imam’s) assistants” (Auserwählten seiner Helfer),\(^{322}\) respectively, while Hussain translated *al-mawlā* as “his servant.”\(^{323}\)

**Mawlā = Client**

A fourth possibility is that *mawlā* denotes client. This meaning should perhaps be the first advanced in discussing any hadith or report that mentions both *mawālī* and the Mahdi or


\(^{320}\) Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥādrat-i valī-i ʿaṣr*, 74 (note 1 by the editor, Muʿallim).

\(^{321}\) Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 84.

\(^{322}\) Klemm, “Die vier sufarāʾ des Zwölften Imām,” 142-3.

\(^{323}\) Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, 142.
Qāʾim. In the first centuries of Islam, the *mawālī* were non-Arab converts to Islam who were forced to affiliate themselves with an Arab tribe and who made up an underprivileged second-class citizenry.\(^{324}\) The promise of the appearance of the Mahdi was especially appealing to many of the *mawālī*.\(^ {325}\) Consequently, many of the *mawālī* were attracted to various movements of Shiʿi or proto-Shiʿi Islam, in particular in its more pronounced messianic and eschatological modes of expression.\(^ {326}\) We know for example that al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd Allāh al-Thaqafī’s (d. 67/686-7) main supporters were *mawālī* of Persian origin from Kūfa, the cradle of Shiʿi Islam.\(^ {327}\) Al-Mukhtār’s failed revolt is not only significant for being widely recognized as the first time the title Mahdi was used with an explicitly messianic connotation as the promised restorer of true Islam – in this case, applied by al-Mukhtār to ʿAlī’s son, Muḥḥammad b. al-

\(^{324}\) One of the best discussions of this topic remains Sharīf’s 1954 work, *al-Ṣirāʿ bayna al-mawālī wa-l-ʿarab*.

\(^{325}\) Daftary, “ʿAlids,” *EI³* (online edition). However, as Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians*, 126 and index, s.v. ‘Mawla [sic], Mawālī’, has shown, Arabs clearly continued to play a role in the various manifestations of Shiʿi messianic fervor.


Hanafiyya\textsuperscript{328} (d. 81/700–1) – but also because two central closely-related doctrines of later Twelver Shi'i Islam were promulgated: 1) the notion of si\textsuperscript{f}a\textsuperscript{ra} in that al-Mukhtār claimed to be the authorized representative of the concealed Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya; 2) the notion of ghayba in that a group of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya’s followers denied his death and claimed that he was simply in hiding. The Kaysāniyya were likewise led by the Persian mawlā Kaysān Abū ‘Amra who enjoyed the support of many mawālī in southern Iraq.\textsuperscript{329} Furthermore, mawālī is used in the sense of clients, or more precisely liberated clients, in hadiths ascribed to the Imams.\textsuperscript{330}

While the Abbasid Revolution is credited with having largely dispelled the glaring distinctions between Arabs Muslims and the mawālī,\textsuperscript{331} it is likely that the above Traditions

\textsuperscript{328} On him, see Buhl, “Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya,” \textit{EI\textsuperscript{2}}, 7:402-3.

\textsuperscript{329} Jafri, \textit{Origins and Early Development of Shi‘a Islam}, 114, 262-3; Amir-Arjomand, “Millenial Beliefs, Hierocratic Authority and Revolution in Shi‘ite Iran,” 221-2; Madelung, “Kaysāniyya,” \textit{EI\textsuperscript{2}}, 4:836-8.

\textsuperscript{330} See for example, al-ʻAyyāshī, \textit{Tafsīr al-ʻAyyāshī}, 2:263 (no. 436), where {the mountains} and {the trees} (Qur’an 16:68) are interpreted by al-Ṣādiq as the Arabs and the mawālī who were freed (al-mawālī ʿatāqat \textit{am}) respectively; referred to in Bar-Asher, \textit{Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shiism}, 111-2.

\textsuperscript{331} Daniel, “‘Abbāsid Revolution,” \textit{EI\textsuperscript{3}} (online edition). Cf. the lengthy Daniel apocalyptic text found in Ibn al-Munādi’s (d. 336/947) \textit{Kitāb al-malāḥim}, where an unnamed mawlā features prominently as a messianic figure, giving us an important window to some of the apocalyptic attitudes that permeated late 3rd-4th/9th-10th cent. Baghdad. For complete translation and discussion, see Cook, “An Early Muslim Daniel Apocalypse.”
originated in a pre-Abbasid milieu during the lifetimes of al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq and were later modified by proponents of the Wāqifiyya to fit their doctrines. Identifying these hadiths as Wāqifi in origin, Madelung translated al-mawlā alladhī yalī amrahu as “the client in charge of his affairs.”\textsuperscript{332} Hussain’s translation of khāṣṣat mawālīhi as “his close associates”\textsuperscript{333} would appear to be similar in meaning.

2.5. Conclusion

The multivalency of mawlā and the resulting ambiguity renders all of the above interpretations tenable, though the evidence is stacked in favor of either client or servant, with the latter being the preferred reading among most Shīʿī scholars.

The above three hadiths are the only Traditions adduced by some later Shīʿī scholars as traditional proofs to lend credence to their position that an elite body of believers – in particular from the ranks of the ulama – can see and recognize the Imam during the Greater Occultation. Yet as we have seen, there is much more to these hadiths than meets the eye. Most importantly, all three hadiths appear to have emanated from the Wāqifi followers of Mūsā al-Kāẓim. As Kohlberg and Madelung have both convincingly demonstrated, many, if not most, of the

\textsuperscript{332} Madelung, “al-Mahdi,” \textit{EI²}, 5:1236.

\textsuperscript{333} Hussain, \textit{The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam}, 142.
hadiths that speak about a *ghayba* or two *ghaybas* for the Qāʾīm had been in existence long before the twelfth Imam. Shiʿī scholars like al-Kulaynī and al-Nuʿmānī drew on these hadiths and brought them into line with the nascent dogmas about the *ghayba* of the twelfth Imam. This was done partly through reinterpreting the earlier reports and partly through producing new reports based on the earlier sources.

It merits repeating that the overwhelming majority of hadiths mentioned in the earliest sources, many of which were discussed in sections 1.5 and 1.6, affirm that the Imam cannot be recognized by anyone during the *ghayba*. The single most important text that negates the possibility of anyone encountering the Imam is the final *tawqīʿ* attributed to the Hidden Imam and it is to a study of this document and its historical context that we now turn.

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CHAPTER 3

“A Lying Impostor”

The death in Shaʿbān 329/May 941 of the last representative of the Hidden Imam marks the start of the second ghayba (commonly referred to in later sources as the Greater Occultation).

In the immediate decades that followed, there was a drive to deny the possibility of ever seeing the Imam again until his zuhūr. This was the position advanced by the Shiʿī Traditionists as reflected in the earliest surviving defenses of the ghayba written by al-Nuʿmānī and al-Ṣadūq and, in particular, the final tawqīʿ of the Hidden Imam recorded by the latter. This position, however, proved untenable. The next generation of scholars revived the rationalist approach that had been in abeyance since the period of the Lesser Occultation. While al-Mufid, the first exponent of the new rationalist Baghdad school, for the most part affirmed the opinion of the Traditionists on the question of seeing and contacting the Imam, his students (and in particular al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā) disagreed with him and maintained that it was at least

theoretically possible for many of the believers to encounter the Imam during the Greater Occultation. We will begin our discussion with the Traditionists.

3.1. The *Kitāb al-ghayba* of the Scribe

Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nuʿmānī (d. 345/956 or 360/971) was an itinerant student of Shiʿī hadith, having travelled in search of Traditions of the Imams to Shiraz, Baghdad, Damascus and Aleppo. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he was a student of al-Kulaynī and is in fact commonly referred to by the agnomen *al-kātib* (“the scribe”) for having personally copied the latter’s *al-Kāfī*, however, unlike his teacher who is believed to have died before the end of the first or shorter ghayba, al-Nuʿmānī’s lived and wrote into the second ghayba as well.337

Al-Nuʿmānī’s *Kitāb al-ghayba* (completed in Dhū al-Ḥijja 342/April-May 954),338 a work we have cited extensively in chapters 1 and 2, is the earliest extant defense of the ghayba of the twelfth Imam from the Greater Occultation. It is difficult to overestimate its importance as a window into the Shiʿī community of the period of heightened ḥayra (confusion,


helplessness and loss) that characterized the period that immediately followed the four sufārāʾ, especially in light of the fact that unlike al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī which is a catalogue of Shiʿī Traditions with few comments from its compiler, al-Nuʿmānī offers valuable observations about the state of the fledgling Twelver Shiʿī community of his time and on rarer occasions, his own interpretation of the Traditions he cites.

In the work’s introduction, al-Nuʿmānī bemoans the fact that the Shiʿa have split into numerous branches (tashaʿʿabat madhāhibuhā). Those who believe in the line of the Imams either do not know who the Hidden Imam is, dispute his existence, or are so pusillanimous as to allow themselves to be overcome with doubt about the ghayba. He has therefore taken

338 Al-Nuʿmānī mentions that the Imam has been in hiding “some 80 years” at the time he is writing, al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 159.

339 Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 27-8. The heresiographical works that have survived from the Lesser Occultation indicate that after the passing of al-ʿAskarī, his followers split into numerous sects. According to al-Nawbakhtī (d. between 300/912-3 and 310/922-3), Kitāb firaq al-Shīʿa, 79-94 (= al-Nawbakhtī, Shīʿa Sects (trans. Kadhim), 153-6) fourteen sects emerged; according to al-Ashʿarī al-Qummī (d. 299/911-2 or 301/913-4), Kitāb al-maqāmāt wa-l-firaq, 102-16, fifteen factions. The celebrated historian and geographer al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), writing circa 332/943-44 (see, Cooperson, “Masʿudi,” Elr (online edition)), says that the followers of al-ʿAskarī split into 21 factions. See al-Masʿūdī, Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar, 4:199, mentioned in al-Majlisi, Biḥār al-anwār, 50:336 (no. 15). We do not know how many of these sects continued to exist at the time of al-Nuʿmānī, who again is writing twelve years after the start of the second ghayba, but it is clear from his description here that many factions continue to vie with one another. A contemporary of al-Nuʿmānī, the Ismāʿīlī dāʿī and Fatimid chief judge, Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nuʿmān b. Muḥammad al-Ṭamīmī al-Maghribī, known as al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974), Sharḥ al-akhbār, 3:313-5, states that 11 sects appeared after the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskari, with number 6 being the Twelver Shīʿa. If al-Mufīd is to believed, the situation
matters into his own hands and decided to write a formal defense of the *ghayba* from the attacks of “those who oppose the tiny group [of believers] who steadfastly follow” (*man khālafa al-shirdhima al-muṣṭaqīma ʿalā*) the hidden twelfth Imam. It is clear from the work’s prologue that at the time in which al-Nuʿmānī is writing (some twelve years after the death of the last representative of the Hidden Imam), the Shiʿa who upheld the *ghayba* of the son of Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī were barely a visible minority. Al-Nuʿmānī refers to his fellow believers as “the small band” (*al-ʿiṣāba al-qalīla*) and “tiny group who stand apart from the great majority who claim to be Shiʿa (*al-shirdhima al-munfārīda ʿan al-khālq al-kāthīr al-muddāʾīn lil-tashayyuʿ*) but who have split into different factions (*fīraḥ*) as a result of their corrupt and selfish inclinations.” These he accuses of stubbornly refusing to patiently endure the loss (*fiqdān*) of the Imam and the length of his *ghayba* despite repeated warnings from the

changed quite rapidly since he is attributed to have said: “Among the *fīraḥ* we have mentioned [of the factions that split after the passing of the Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, the eleventh Imam], the only *fīraḥ* that still exists in our time, which is the year 373/983-4, is the Twelver-Imāmī (*al-imāmiyya al-ithnāʿashariyya*) whose followers believe in the Imamate of (al-ʿAskarī’s) son and who are certain that he is alive and will continue to live until the moment [at the end of time] when he rises with the sword,” al-Murtaḍāʾ/[al-Mufid], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 321.

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341 Al-Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba*, 34.

(previous) Imams to remain steadfast, e.g., “Be not distressed at the small number of those who tread the path of guidance” (lā tastawḥishū fī ṭarīq al-hudā li-qillat man yaslukuhu).343

The Kitāb al-ghayba is the first Shiʿī work in which the distinguishing features of the two ghaybas are delineated: “As for the first ghayba, it was when there were representatives (al-sufārāʾ) between the Imam and the people who had been appointed (manṣūbīn) [by the Imam].” It is noteworthy that al-Nuʿmānī neither identifies these representatives nor for that matter suggests that they were only four in number as codified a century later by al-Ṭūsī. He says only that they were prominent people who were visible and well-known to the believers (ẓāhirīn mawjūdī al-ashkhāṣ wa-l-aʿyān). These representatives served as messengers between the Imam and the faithful, providing answers to all manner of abstruse questions and problems posed by the believers to their Imam. However, al-Nuʿmānī adds, “this was the short ghayba (al-ghayba al-qāṣīra) whose days have come to an end and whose time has now passed. The second ghayba (al-ghayba al-thāniyya) is the one during which the representatives (al-sufārāʾ) and the intermediaries (al-wasāʾīt)344 have been removed for a purpose intended by God.” Al-

343 Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 175 (also cited in idem, 34, 35). An almost identical statement is found in al-Imām ʿAlī (attributed), Nahj al-balāgha, 319 (sermon 201).

344 This is one of the two times in the text where al-Nuʿmānī mentions the wasāʾīt (see below for the other mention). It is not clear if this is another term for the sufārāʾ or if it refers to a different class of individuals who served as the Imam’s agents and deputies, similar to the term wukalāʾ used by scholars.
Nuʿmānī declares that this “second ghayba,” a time in which the believers are tested (al-tamhīṣ wa-l-imḥīṭān), thrown into confusion (al-balbala), sifted (al-gharbala), and purified (al-taṣḥīḥa), “is now upon us.”345 Yet according to him, the Traditions of the Prophet and previous Imams predicted both the ghayba of the twelfth Imam (referred to inter alia as the ‘the master of truth’ - šāḥīb al-ḥaqq) and the ghayba of “the means [of reaching the Imam]” (al-sabāb), that is, the Imam’s representatives and intermediaries who constituted the support (al-sanād) whom the Shi’a relied on. The moment this support was removed, they became like goats without a

before and after al-Nuʿmānī (the related term nuwwāb is a Safavid invention when the four sufarāʾ came to be known as al-nuwwāb al-khāṣṣa and the ulama as al-nuwwāb al-ʿāmma of the Hidden Imam).

345 Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 178-9. A different translation of a part of this passage is provided by Hussain, The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, 140-1. Cf. Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 85-6. A partial Persian translation is given by Amini, Dādgustar-i jahān, 134-5, though he interpolates a phrase that is not found in the original text: “through the intermediation (of the sufarāʾ), the sick were healed (marīḍ-hāyī shifā yāftand).” Equally strange is Sachedina’s translation of this passage of Amini’s work: “…from [their] hands emanated cures derived from the knowledge and the intricate wisdom which they possessed,” Amini, al-Imām al-Mahdī (trans. Sachedina), 129. (It is clear that Sachedina failed to consult the original Arabic of al-Nuʿmānī’s text). Interestingly, although al-Nuʿmānī is the first scholar to outline the distinguishing features of the two ghaybas – an idea which as we saw in chapter 2, was clearly borrowed from the post-Mūsā al-Kāẓım Wāqifīs – he nonetheless includes hadiths that mention only one ghayba for the Qāʾīm as well, e.g., the following intriguing hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq: “The master of this amr will have a ghayba. He will say during it, {I fled from you when I feared you. But [now] my Lord has granted me the Law and made me one of the messengers} (Qurʾān 26:21),” al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 173 (no. 10). According to this Tradition, when he appears, the Qāʾīm will reveal new laws and declare that he is a messenger of God.
shepherd\textsuperscript{346} and the upheaval (fitna) of the second occultation commenced.\textsuperscript{347} For as long as they had intermediaries (al-wasāʾiṭ) between themselves and the Hidden Imam, there was a means to communicate (balāgh) with him and receive guidance (hudā). God then decreed “to remove such means” (rafʿ al-asbāb) during the second ghayba in order to further test the Shiʿa.\textsuperscript{348}

Al-Nuʿmānī’s Kitāb al-ghayba represents an initial push to deny any possibility of contacting the Imam until his reappearance (in Shiʿi parlance, commonly called his ṣuhūr). Al-Nuʿmānī is adamant that seeing the Imam is no longer possible: The Imam physically exists (inna al-imām mawjūd al-ʿayn wa-l-shakhṣ); however, at this time [i.e. in the second ghayba] and “until the day of [the appointed] time and the promise [when] the caller will call from the sky (cf. Qur’ān 50:41)” (ilā yawm al-waqt wa-l-waʿd wa-nidāʾ al-munādī min al-samāʾ), “he sees but is not seen” (yarā wa-lā yurā).\textsuperscript{349}

\textsuperscript{346} Al-Nuʿmānī is here alluding to a hadith ascribed to ʿAlī cited in his al-Ghayba, 197 (no. 3), and translated in chapter 1 of our study.

\textsuperscript{347} Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 198.

\textsuperscript{348} Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 198. See also al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 164. The idea that the purpose of the ghayba is to test the faith of the Shiʿa is found in numerous hadiths. See, e.g., al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 156 (no. 11), and chapter 2 of our study.

\textsuperscript{349} Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 138.
According to al-Nuʿmānī, the “widely attested” (mutawātir) Traditions he has presented suffice and testify to the truth (ṣiḥba) of the ghayba and the concealment of knowledge (ikhtifāʾ al-ʿilm) and “by knowledge is meant the Proof (of God) to the world [i.e., the Hidden Imam].” The previous Imams commanded the Shiʿa to cling steadfastly to their creed, never shake or waver in their belief and yearn patiently for the Imam’s ẓuhūr. Al-Nuʿmānī then makes a striking statement: while the Shiʿa still have an obligation to know and recognize their Imam, they “are excused from not being able to see the Proof (of God) and Imam of their time during [his] ghayba (wa-hum maʿdhūrūn fī an lā yaraw ḥujjatahum wa-imānī zamānishim fī ayyām al-ghayba).” In fact, they are forbidden to search for the Imam (wa-maḥẓūr ʿalayhim al-fāhs wa-l-kashf ʿan šāḥib al-ghayba), to demand to know his name or to ask where he lives or where he is hiding. They are even prohibited from “speaking about him in glowing terms, to say nothing of asking to see him with their own eyes” (wa-maḥẓūr ʿalayhim...al-ishāda bi-dhikrihi faḍl ʿan al-muṭalaba bi-muʿāyinatihi). Unlike the people of knowledge (ahl al-maʿrifā) who submit to the bidding of God and endure patiently, only the people of ignorance (ahl al-jahl) fail to discern what the Imams have said and demand instead to be guided to the Hidden Imam and his

350 Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 163-4.
location (yūṭālibūna bi-l-irshād ilā shakhṣīhi wa-l-dalāla ‘alā mawḍī’ihi) or insist imperiously that he show himself to them (wa-yaqtariḥūna iẓhārahū lahum).

It is difficult to not see in these words an implicit dialogue with the rival Ismā‘īlī Shi‘a. The crisis that followed the death of Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī in 260/874 had played into the hands of the Ismā‘īlī mission or ‘Call to Truth’ (daʿwat al-ḥaqq) as many of al-ʿAskarī’s former followers switched allegiance to the Ismā‘īlī Imam, including the founder of the Ismā‘īlī community in Yemen, Ibn Ḥawshab, known as Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. 302/914), who came from a prominent proto-Twelver family in Baghdad. On the eve of the Fatimid dynasty (297/909-567/1171), reports indicate that some of the former followers of al-ʿAskarī left Baghdad when

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351 Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 164.

352 As Halm has pointed out, the followers of the movement we now call Ismā‘īlī used other terms to describe themselves, namely ahl al-ḥaqq (the people of truth or the people of God), their movement as din al-ḥaqq (the religion of truth) or simply al-ḥaqq, and the preaching of their movement as daʿwat al-ḥaqq (the call to truth) or simply al-daʿwa. See Halm, The Empire of the Mahdi, 17; Halm, Die Schia, 194. Likewise, the Ismā‘īlī Caliphate that ruled until 567/1171 is commonly called the Fatimid dynasty but in their documents, the Fatimids referred to themselves as dawlat al-ḥaqq (the dynasty/cycle of truth). See Halm, Die Schia, 209.

353 On him, see Halm, “Ebn Ḥawšab,” EIr, 8:28-9. Al-Yaman was plagued with doubts after the death of al-ʿAskarī and openly complained about “the fraud which the followers of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (the twelfth Imam) were perpetrating.” Halm, The Empire of the Mahdi, 32. Halm’s statement that “his was father was a Twelver Shi'i” (Halm, “Ebn Ḥawšab,” EIr, 8:28) need to be modified since we cannot speak of a Twelver Shi‘i Islam before 260/874. See also Halm, Shi‘ism, 164: “Ismā‘īlī propaganda (da‘wa) was aimed in particular at the Imāmī Shi‘ites who had been shaken by the death of their eleventh Imam.”
the Fatimid Caliph ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī (d. 322/934) assumed power to encourage him to conquer the Abbasid capital and the eastern frontiers. Meanwhile, followers of the eastern Ismāʿīli branch known as the Qarāmiṭa ridiculed the Twelver Shiʿa for their belief in an absent, concealed Imam. It is not surprising therefore to find that proto-Twelver and Twelver Shiʿi scholars were actively involved in anti-Ismāʿīli polemics during this period. Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nishābūrī (d. 260/873), a confidant of the eleventh Imam, wrote a refutation of the Ismāʿīlis (which has not survived) called al-Radd ʿalā bāṭiniyya wa-l-Qarāmiṭa. Al-Kulaynī likewise authored a work attacking the Qarāmiṭa entitled Kitāb al-radd ʿalā al-Qarāmiṭa. And his Uṣūl al-kāfī includes numerous Traditions that seek to discredit Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar and remonstrate with  

354 Halm, The Empire of the Mahdi, 182.

355 See for example the text translated by Halm, The Empire of the Mahdi, 254 (note 398), and attributed to a Qarāmāṭī propagandist: “Our Imam is the Mahdi so-and-so, son of so-and-so, the son of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq; we are not like those stupid Twelver Shiʿites (rāfīḍa) who make propaganda for an expected Absent One.” On the Qarāmāṭa, see Madelung, “Ḵarmaṭī,” EI²; Daftary, “Carmatians,” Elr, 4:823-32; and the important study by Madelung, “The Fatimids and the Qarmaṭīs of Bahrayn,” 21-73, in which he corrects the notion advanced by Sunni polemicists and western scholars, in particular M. J. de Goeje, in demonstrating that the Qarmaṭī leaders in Bahrain were not in collusion with the Fatimids.


the Ismāʿīlis of his own time.\textsuperscript{358} Al-Kulaynī’s contemporary, ʿAli b. Bābūya al-Qummī (father of al-Ṣadūq), included reports in his \textit{al-Imāma wa-l-tabşira min al-hayra} discrediting Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar.\textsuperscript{359}

The threat posed by Ismāʿīlī Shīʿa remained so great in 342/954 that al-Nuʿmānī devoted two complete chapters of his \textit{Kitāb al-ghayba} to (1) Traditions denouncing the right of Ismāʿīl to the imamate\textsuperscript{360} and (2) Traditions concerning “those who claim to be an Imam yet are not” (\textit{man zaʿama annahu imāmi wa-laysa bi-imām}).\textsuperscript{361} According to al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058-9), al-

\textsuperscript{358} For example, al-Kulaynī includes a report of a believer and his father who wrote letters to the Hidden Imam and received responses (the contents of these letters and responses is not revealed). A third person then wrote a letter and did not receive a response. The reason: he had become a Qarmaṭī (\textit{anna al-rajul tahawwala qarmatīyy}), the Hidden Imam miraculously knowing this, al-Kulaynī, \textit{al-Kāfī}, 1:520 (no. 13); repeated in al-Ḥalabī, \textit{Taqrīb al-maʿārif}, 434; al-Ṭabrisī, \textit{Iʿlām al-warā}, 2:263; al-Majlisī, \textit{Biḥār al-anwār}, 51:309-10 (no. 28); al-Shirāzī, \textit{Kalimat al-Imām al-Mahdī}, 524-5 (no. 7). An example of the many implicitly anti-Ismāʿīlī hadiths in \textit{al-Kāfī} is one in which al-Bāqir glosses Qur’an 39:60, {And upon the Day of Resurrection thou shalt see those who lied against God, their faces blackened; is there not in Gehenna a lodging for those that are proud?}, as “he who claims that he is an Imam yet is not an Imam.” When asked, “Even if he is a descendant of ʿAlī and a descendant of Fāṭima? (\textit{wa-in kāna alawiyy wa-fāṭimiyy}), al-Bāqir responded, “Yes, even should he be a descendant of both ʿAlī and Fāṭima.” al-Kulaynī, \textit{al-Kāfī}, 1:372; al-Qummī, \textit{Tafsīr al-Qummī}, 2:69; Al-Nuʿmānī, \textit{al-Ghayba}, 113 (no. 5).


\textsuperscript{361} Al-Nuʿmānī, \textit{al-Ghayba}, 111-6 (bāb 5). Cf. the claim made by Sajjādī, “Ghaybat-i Nuʿmānī,” \textit{DMT}, 12:155, that the Ismāʿīli philosopher Abū Ḩātim al-Rāzī stated in the introduction of his \textit{Aʿlām al-
Nuʿmānī also authored a celebrated refutation of the Ismāʿīlīs (which has not survived) called

Kitāb al-radd ʿalā al-Ismāʿīliyya. Moreover, both al-Nuʿmānī and several of the scholars who followed him regularly conducted debates with Ismāʿīlī propagandists.

3.2. The Veracious Teacher

The other prominent Traditionist from the early decades of the second ghayba whose apologies of the occultation has survived is Abū Jaʿfar Muhammad b. ʿAlī, known as al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (“the veracious teacher”) (b. ca. 311/923; d. 381/991).

_That_ he requested al-Nuʿmānī to write Kitāb al-ghayba in defense of the occultation of the twelfth Imam. Equally surprising is Sajjādī’s accusation that the Ismāʿīlīs excised this sentence from later manuscripts and published editions of this work. Both claims require further investigation.


^364^ On al-Ṣadūq and his works, see Khusravi, _Shaykh Ṣadūq_, al-Aʿlamī, introduction to al-Ṣadūq, _Kamāl al-dīn_, 5-11; Serdani, _Der verborgene Imam: Eine Untersuchung der chiliastischen Gedanken im schiitischen Islam nach Ibn Bābūya (gest. 991)_: Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-nīʿma; McDermott, “Ebn Bābawayh (2),” _Elr_, 8:2-4; Kohlberg, “Ibn Bābawayhi or Ibn Bābūyah,” _ER_, 6:4262-3; Amir-Moezzi, _Le Guide divin_ 53-4; Akhtar, _Early Shiʿite Imāmiyyah Thinkers_, 39-77. As mentioned in chapter 1, al-Ṣadūq’s birth is credited to the miraculous intervention of the Hidden Imam after his father wrote a letter to Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī asking him to intercede on his behalf with the Hidden Imam to pray that he be given a son. See Majlisi, _Ḥaqq al-yaqīn_, 319.
Al-Ṣadūq addresses the ghayba of the twelfth Imam in a number of works though he often avoids the question of seeing the Imam. In his al-Iʿtiqādāt fī al-imāmiyya, the earliest extant Shiʿi creed, he affirms: “We believe that no one else [but the twelfth Imam] can be the Qāʾim (lā yajūz an yakūn al-qāʾim ghayrahu) no matter how long he may remain in a state of ghayba. Even were he to remain in hiding in perpetuum, no one other than him could ever be the Qāʾim” (wa-law baqiya fi ghaybatihī ʿumr al-dunyā lam yakun al-qāʾim ghayrahu). In this statement of core Shiʿi beliefs, al-Ṣadūq chooses not to broach the question of whether the Imam can ever be contacted or encountered during the ghayba.

The same silence can be observed in the record of a series of debates al-Ṣadūq conducted at the court of the head of the Buyid confederation, Rukn al-Dawla (d. 366/976). It appears that al-Ṣadūq’s approach was to let the remainder of his creed serve as a veiled statement of his doctrine of ghayba. This strategic silence illustrates the centrality of this concept in his thought and practice.

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365 On the development and use of Islamic creedal compositions, see Watt, “ʿAḳīda,” EI², 1:332-6.

366 Here, again, al-Ṣadūq is in implicit dialogue with other Shiʿi groups (viz., the Fatimids, the Qarāmiṭa, and Zaydīs) who supported rival claimants to the Mahdi-Qāʾim (which by his time, were seen by the Shiʿa as one being one and the same person).

367 Al-Ṣadūq, al-Iʿtiqādāt fī al-imāmiyya, 95. For a different translation, see Fyzee, A Shiʿite Creed, 86. See also al-Ṣadūq, al-Iʿtiqādāt fī al-imāmiyya, 94 (note 1); Fyzee, A Shiʿite Creed, 85. In his critical commentary and correction of al-Ṣadūq’s creed, al-Mufīd does not mention the twelfth Imam and in fact makes no references to the ghayba, al-Mufīd, Taṣḥīḥ al-iʿtiqād bi-ṣawāb al-intiqād aw sharḥ ʿaqāʾid al-Ṣadūq. On this work, see Halm, Shiʿism, 49.

368 The original Arabic record of the debates have only recently (1431/2010) been published for the first time, see al-Ṣadūq, Munāẓarat al-Malik Rukn al-Dawla lil-Ṣadūq b. Bābūyah. The editor, Syrian scholar Jawād al-Ward, relied in part on a previously unpublished and undated manuscript available in Iran’s
would be useful to review the portion of the debates in which al-Ṣadūq seeks to prove and defend the ghayba of the twelfth Imam. Rukn al-Dawla is said to have asked him three questions about the Hidden Imam. First, he asked when the Imam will appear. Al-Ṣadūq responded that God has concealed the Imam from the people for a wisdom and purpose known to Him alone, adducing the prophetic hadith: “The Qāʾim [who will appear] from my descendants is like the Hour [of the Day of Judgment]” (mathal al-Qāʾim min wuldī mathal al-sāʿa).

Rukn al-Dawla’s second question dealt with how the Imam could live so long. Al-Ṣadūq defended the Imam’s superhuman longevity by adducing the story of Noah from the Qur’an who is said to have lived 950 years. But when Rukh al-Dawla objected that no one lives as

Parliament Library (see al-Ṣadūq, Munāẓarat, 24-5 (from the editor’s introduction)). On other extant manuscripts of this work in Iran, see Tafaḍḍulī, Kitābshināsī-i nuskhahā-yi khaṭṭī-i āthār-i Shaykh Ṣadūq dar Iran, 254-62. A Persian translation of parts of these debates was previously published in the well-known Safavid jurist al-Qāḍī Nūr Allāh Shūshtari’s (d. 1019/1610-11) Majālis al-muʾminīn, 1:461-3. Al-Ṣadūq was invited to Rayy by Rukn al-Dawla in 350/962 and was held in great esteem while he was there. See Madelung, “Imamism and Mu’tazilite Theology,” 20; Serdani, Der verborgene Imam, 51-3 (Ibn Bābūyas Beziehungen zu den Herrschern). On Rukn al-Dawla, see Bowen and Bosworth, “Rukn al-Dawla, Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥasan b. Bāya,” EI², 8:597-8; Donohue, The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334H./945 to 403H./1012, index, s.v. ‘Rukn al-Dawla’. For al-Ṣadūq’s record of still another debate at the court of Rukn al-Dawla (referred to below), see al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 92-3.

long as Noah anymore, al-Ṣadūq responded by quoting a hadith ascribed to Muḥammad prophecying that everything which occurred in the past will be repeated in his community. He then argued that since no one is more well-known than the Mahdī (layṣa hunāka man huwa akthar shuhrat“ min al-imām al-mahdī), it is only natural to expect that the prophetic precedent of prolongation of life (sunnat ṭūl al-ʿumr) would be fulfilled by the Hidden Imam.

Finally, Rukn al-Dawla inquired about what need was served by an absent Imam, a question which as will see, would be of paramount importance for the rationalist scholars who followed al-Ṣadūq. Al-Ṣadūq responded with alacrity by adducing the traditional proof found in Shiʿī hadiths that the world will cease to exist without the presence of an Imam. Citing Qurʾan 8:33, {But God would never chastise them, with thee [O Muḥammad] among them}, he maintained that just as God did not punish the people while the Prophet was alive, He will not chastise the world while an Imam exists for “the Imam is the successor of the Prophet in every way except in prophecy and the descent of revelation” (illā fī al-nubuwwa wa-nuzūl al-waḥy).

That al-Ṣadūq did not broach the possibility of seeing the Imam in the above works amounts to an argumentum e silentio. In a different debate conducted with an unnamed heretic

(mulhid) also held at the court of Rukn al-Dawla, al-Ṣadūq was asked how he personally could believe in an Imam that he cannot see. He responded that if faith was contingent on seeing, no one would believe in God or the Prophet since no one has physically seen them.371

Al-Ṣadūq addresses the question of contacting the Hidden Imam more directly in his magnum opus on the ghayba, entitled Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿma fī ithbāt al-ghayba wa-kashf al-ḥayra, a work which has been described as “the comprehensive work on the subject of the twelfth Imam and his ghayba.”372 Similar to al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ṣadūq decided to undertake this work after becoming deeply perturbed by the doubts and questions that pervaded the Shi‘ī community in Nishāpūr during his time there.373 Above and beyond the Traditions al-Ṣadūq cites in Kamāl al-dīn negating the possibility of seeing the Imam (see chapter 1 of our study), he maintains that the Shi‘a cannot reach the Imam or know where he is hiding because people

371 Al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 93.

372 Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 79. In the classical period (pre-Mongol invasion), al-Ṣadūq’s work was also referred to as Kitāb al-ghayba, al-Kamāl fī al-ghayba, Kamāl al-niʿma fī al-ghayba, and Ikmāl al-dīn wa-ītmām al-niʿma. See Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work, 210 (no. 251).

373 Serdani, Der verborgene Imam, 59, sets 368/978-9 as the terminus post quem of the work’s composition. See also Ourghi, Schiitischer Messianismus, 30-1. Sachedina, who mistakenly dates the death of al-Ṣadūq as 981AD, suggests that Kamāl al-dīn “seems to have been written during the last years of (al-Ṣadūq’s) life—the time when the Imāmites were under attack from Ismāʿīlites [sic];…the Zaydites…; and the Sunnites.” Sachedina, “A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imāmite Imam,” 112. See also Amīnī, “Kitāb-i ghaybat-i Shaykh Ṭūsī,” 480.
by nature cannot keep secrets. If his location were revealed or if he met with some of his believers, there would be a risk that one of them might unintentionally divulge this information because when something – anything – is disclosed, one can never be sure that it will not get into the wrong hands.\textsuperscript{374} Moreover, if the Imam could be seen, some Shi’a might, during polemics \textit{(fī awqāt al-jidāl)} with their opponents, reveal his identity or give away his location.\textsuperscript{375} In sum, the Imam cannot be seen.

\textbf{3.3. The Final Missive of the Hidden Imam}

In \textit{Kamāl al-dīn}, al-Ṣadūq is the first scholar to record the \textit{locus classicus} for proscribing the possibility of seeing the Imam in the second \textit{ghayba}: the final written communication \textit{(tawqīʿ)} of the Hidden Imam.\textsuperscript{376} This short missive, a document “d’une

\textsuperscript{374} Al-Ṣadūq, \textit{Kamāl al-dīn}, 54

\textsuperscript{375} Al-Ṣadūq, \textit{Kamāl al-dīn}, 54-5; referred to in Kohlberg, “\textit{Taqiyya} in Shi’i Theology and Religion,” 350.

\textsuperscript{376} On the \textit{tawqīʿāt} of the Imams, and in particular, the Hidden Imam, see Shabiri, “\textit{Tawqi} (3),” \textit{DJI} (online edition); Ḥā’irī, “\textit{Tawqi}āt,” \textit{DMT}, 5:150-3. In the classical period, \textit{tawqīʿ} had three general meanings: 1. the record of a verdict in a tort redress; 2. a written edit; 3. a signature at the end of a letter. See Babinger and Bosworth, “\textit{Tawqīʿ},” \textit{EI\textsuperscript{2}}, 6:933-5 (where there is no mention of the \textit{tawqīʿāt} of the Shi’ī Imams). On the literary qualities of the first two usages, see now Gruendler, “\textit{Tawqīʿ} (Apostille): Royal Brevity in the Pre-Modern Islamic Appeals Court,” 101-29. There are approximately 70 documents identified as \textit{tawqīʿāt} from the Hidden Imam. See Rīḍvānī, \textit{Mawsū‘īdshināsī va pāsukh bīh shubuhāt}, 271. With the exception of two (both addressed to Shaykh Mufīd; on these, see chapter 4), all of the \textit{tawqīʿāt} allegedly written by the Hidden Imam are from the Lesser Occultation. The \textit{tawqīʿāt} are compiled in two contemporary works, Akbar-Nijād, \textit{Mawsū‘at tawqīʿāt al-imām al-mahdī} and al-Shirāzī,
importance capital dans la destine historique et doctrinal de l’imâmisme,” was furnished by ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī (d. 329/941),378 canonized in later sources as the fourth and final of the four representatives (sufarāʾ), six days before his death.379 The tawqīʿ was then cited Kalimat al-Imām al-Mahdī. A comprehensive study of the tawqīʿāt remains a desideratum but one is struck by the fact that a majority of these letters deal with either questions of money or instances of excommunication (viz., charging certain believers such as al-Shalmaghānī with heresy and apostasy, see Hussain, The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, 126-32; Amir Arjomand, The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam, 42-3; and Amir Arjomand, “Imam Absconditus and the Beginnings of a Theology of Occultation,” 2). [377] Amir-Moezzi, Le Guide divin, 276 [= Amir-Moezzi, The Divine Guide, 114].

378 His name is often misspelled in western sources as al-Samarri based on the assumption that he was from the city of Sāmarrāʾ where the Hidden Imam is first believed to have entered into hiding, but if that were the case, we would expect a nisba of al-Sāmarrāʾī. Halm, Die Schia, 43 (note 16), suggests a vocalization of al-Simmarī after Simmar, located in southern Iraq near Kashkar between Wāsi ṭ and Baṣra. Hussain, The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, 133, offers the same explanation, though he renders the nisba al-Sammari. The correct vocalization, however, appears to be al-Samuri, a nisba that reverts to one of his ancestors whose name was al-Samur (meaning gum-acacia-tree, Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1:1425). This vocalization is given in al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1093/1682), al-Hidāyā li-shīʿat aʿimmat al-hudā, 1:96; Faridani, “Samuri,” DMT, 9:292; and ʿAli, al-Mahdī al-muntaẓar ‘inda al-Shīʿa al-ithnī ʿashariyya, 239 [= Arabic translation of Ali, Der Mahdī der Zwölfer-Schiʿa und seine vier Safīre, which was not available to me]. Al-Ṣadr, Tārikh al-ghayba al-ṣughrā, 412, states that some have written his name as al-Saymarī or al-Ṣaymarī but he has not given a source and we have never encountered these vocalizations. On the four sufarāʾ in general, see Ali, “Die beiden ersten Safīre des Zwölften Imāms,” 224-7; Klemm, “Die vier sufarāʾ des Zwölften Imām Zur formativen Periode der Zwölferṣīʿa.”

379 Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 394 (no. 364), is the first work in which we find a report stating that al-Samuri died on 15 Shaʿbān 329/20 May 941 when the Hidden Imam would have been almost 70 years old. However, both al-Ṭabarsī and Ibn Ṭawūs state that al-Samuri died in 328/940 while adding that the Lesser Occultation lasted 74 years. (Al-Majlisī, Mirāʾat al-ʿuqūl, 4:52-3, reasons that al-Ṭabarsī and Ibn Ṭawūs are calculating the Lesser Occultation from the year the Hidden Imam was born rather than the year when Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī died. This view is repeated in al-Ṣadr, Tārikh al-ghayba al-ṣughrā, 417).
some eighty years after al-Ṣadūq in al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-ghayba*, who states that he heard it from a group of Shi’a on the authority of al-Ṣadūq. For ease of comparison, the texts are presented side-by-side in the following table followed by a translation. The text of the *tawqiʿ* is almost identical in both works with one major difference (underlined below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067-8)</th>
<th>Al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991-2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kitāb al-ghayba</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʾma</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) حَدَّثَنَا أُبُو مُحَمَّدٍ اﻟْحَسَنُ بْنُ أَحْمَدَ ﺍﻟْمُﻛَتْبُ قَالَ:</td>
<td>(1) حَدَّثَنَا أُبُو مُحَمَّدٍ اﻟْحَسَنُ بْنُ أَحْمَدَ ﺍﻟْمُﻛَتْبُ قَالَ:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>وأَخْبرَنَا جَمَاعَةً عَنْ أَبِي حَجرِرُ مُحَمَّدٍ بْنِ عَلِيّ بْنِ اﻟْحَسَنِ بْنِ ﺑَانُو سُرِّيَّ اﻟْمُﻛَتْبُ قَالَ:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following translation is based on the version of the *tawqīʿ* in al-Ṣadūq:

(1) Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Mukattib told us:

(2) I was in Baghdad the year ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī died. I visited him a few days before he died when he showed the people a *tawqīʿ* [from the Hidden Imam] which I copied:


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382 He was one of the teachers of al-Ṣadūq. See Dhākirī, “Irtibāṭ bā imām-i zamān,” 57.
and glorified be He - and that will only happen after a long time has passed, when hearts have become callous and oppression has filled the earth.\(^{383}\)

(4) (Before I reappear), some will come to my Shi‘a claiming to have seen (me) with their own eyes.\(^{384}\) But beware! Anyone who claims to have seen (me) before the appearance of al-Sufyānī\(^{385}\) and [the sounding of] the Cry\(^{386}\) is a lying impostor\(^{387}\); and there is no power, nor strength, except in God, the Exalted, the Great.\(^{388}\)

\(^{383}\) This is a reference to the famous prophetic hadith that God will raise up one of Muḥammad’s descendants at the End of Time (near or on the Day of Resurrection) who will fill the earth with equity and justice, even as it has been filled with injustice and tyranny, al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 1:338 (no. 7).

\(^{384}\) It is also possible to read this sentence as: ““(Before I reappear), my Shi‘a will come, those claiming to have seen (me) with their own eyes.” Cf. Shubbar (d. 1242/1826-7), Haqq al-yaqīn fī ma‘rifat usūl al-dīn, 287, who reproduces the tawqī‘ from a manuscript of al-Ṭabarsī’s al-Iḥtijāj ‘alā ahl al-lajāj (on whom, see chapter 4) and has this sentence as: “(Before I reappear), some will come claiming to have seen (me)...” (wa-saya‘ī man yadda‘ī al-mushāhada), i.e. without the word “my Shi‘a” (shī‘atī).

\(^{385}\) In early Shi‘i sources, likely originating in a Kūfan anti-Umawī collection of apocalyptic literature, al-Sufyānī is presented as the chief opponent and eschatological Doppelgänger of the Mahdī. See Cook, Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic, index, s.v. ‘Sufyānī and Sufyānī cycle’; Cook, “Hadith, Authority and the End of the World,” 34; Madelung, “The Sufyānī between Tradition and History,” 5-48; Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 165, 211 (note 66); Poonawala, “Apocalyptic ii. In Muslim Iran,” Elr, 2:157-60; Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period,” 254-6, 262. For Shi‘i hadiths that mention his rise as one of the signs that will precede the appearance of the Qāʾim, see al-Nu‘mānī, al-Ghayba, 310-8 (chapter 18: mā jāʾa fī dhikr al-Sufyānī wa-anna amrahu min al-maḥtūm). His name suggests that he will be a descendant of the Umayyad patriarch, Abū Sufyān (d. 32/653[?]), the archenemy of Muhammad.

\(^{386}\) The Cry is mentioned six times in the Qur’an as the harbinger of the end of the world and the arrival of the Day of Judgment, most prominently Qur’an 50:42: {On the day they hear the Cry in truth, that is the day of coming forth}. See ‘Ali, al-Mahdī al-muntaẓar ‘inda al-Shī‘a al- ithnī ‘ashariyya, 241 (note 6); Raven, “Reward and Punishment,” EQ, 4:451-61. The sounding of the cosmic Cry or Scream from the heavens is glossed as one of the portents of the appearance of the Qāʾim in Shi‘i sources. See Amir-Moezzi, Le Guide divin, 287 [= Amir-Moezzi, The Divine Guide, 118]; Ghaemmaghami, “{And the Earth will Shine with the Light of its Lord} (Q 39:69): qāʾim and qiyāma in Shi‘i Islam.” On the Cry, see also Cook, “The Apocalyptic Year 200/815-16 and the Events Surrounding It,” 64; Lawson, “Duality, Opposition and Typology in the Qur’an,” 37-8. Cf. ‘Ali’s declaration in the well-known
(5) (Al-Mukattib) said: We copied this tawqīʿ and left (al-Samurī’s) home. Six days later, we returned and found him in the throes of death. Someone said to him, ‘[Tell us,] who is to succeed you?’ He responded, ‘God has an amr [here, likely meaning purpose] which He will surely accomplish’ (cf. Qur’an 65:3). He passed away, may God be pleased with him, and these were the last words anyone heard from him.”

Khuṭbat al-bayān that he is al-ṣayḥa, al-Bursī, Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn, 319 (cf. Dihdār-Shīrāzī, Sharḥ khuṭbat al-bayān 76).

387 Al-Ṣadūq has the nomen agentis al-kādhib (liar OR one who lies, deludes and misleads since the nomen agentis in Arabic is properly speaking a verbal adjective) while al-Ṭūsī gives the more intensive verbal adjective al-kadhdhāb (a habitual liar) from the faʿʿāl form, the ism al-mubālagha (the noun of intensiveness). The phrase is clearly meant to recall the Quranic verse, {He is naught but a man who has forged against God a lie} (in huwa illā rajul iftarāʿa laa Allah kadhīban) (Q 23:38). The location iftarā (or some other form of this verb) ‘ala Allāh kadhīban/al-kadhdhāb is encountered 21 times in the Qur’an, e.g. 4:50, 6:21, 10:69, 21:61, 34:8. The word may have been changed by al-Ṭūsī (or one of the unnamed transmitters) to kadhdhāb as a further slight against Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī, the brother of the Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī who is referred to as Jaʿfar al-Kadhdhāb in Shiʿī sources for claiming that al-ʿAskarī did not have a surviving son and (in some narrations) proclaiming himself the next Imam. In later Shiʿī sources, e.g., Majlisi, Jalāʾ al-ʿuyūn, 869, the sixth Imam, Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, is said to have adopted the epithet al-Ṣādiq to distinguish himself from this future Jaʿfar al-Kadhdhāb. This report is one of many circulated to vilify Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī.

388 The nuances of this common Arabic exclamation (lit., there is no possibility for change/transformation/motion or strength/power except from/by/through God, the [Most] Exalted, the [Most] Great), known as the ḥawqala, are difficult to convey in English. The ḥawqala is sometimes found at the end of a composition as it is here but its more common usage in both classical and modern sources is after hearing disastrous news or something blasphemous or reprehensible. See Piamenta, Islam in Everyday Arabic Speech, 155-8 (6.2.2 The ḥawqala). Its use at the end of this tawqīʿ immediately serves to emphasize the previous sentence gainsaying anyone who claims to see the Imam before his appearance at the eschaton.

389 The expression jāda bi-nafsihi (lit., to give generously of one’s self or sacrifice oneself) is said of someone who is in the agony of death (ʿind al-mawt) or about to give up the spirit, Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿArab, 5:21; Lane, An Arabic-English Lexicon, 1:481.

390 For different translations, see Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 96; Amini, al-Imām al-Mahdī (trans. Sachedina), 138. In both cases, Sachedina interpolates the key sentence as, “In the near future there will

391 See the notes following the Arabic text of the *tawqiʿ* for some of these references. A few scholars have discussed the *tawqiʿ* but chosen to blatantly ignore or leave out the “lying impostors” sentence. For example, the well-known East African Khoja Shiʿī scholar Mullah Haji Mohammadjaffer Sheriff Dewji (d. 1960) mentions the final *tawqiʿ* in his defense of the Hidden Imam but inexplicably leaves out this sentence. Dewji, *Imame Zaman Hazrat Mehdi (A.S.)*, 46. Since his book features stories of “numerous persons [who] have reported meeting Hazrat Mehdi (A.S.)” (*idem*, 129) during the Greater Occultation (cited from the works of al-Nūrī (on him, see below)), Dewji likely felt that this sentence of the *tawqiʿ* conflicted with the accounts and did not bother attempting a reconciliation. A deliberate distortion of the *tawqiʿ* can also be observed in a self-purportted “analytical history” of the ghayba by Shiʿī scholars, Pūr-Sayyid-Āqāyī, Jabbārī, ʿĀshūrī and Ḥakīm, titled, *Tārīkh-i ʿāsr-i ghaybat: Nīgāhī tāhlīlī bih ʿāsr-i ghaybat-i imām-i davāzdahum*. In their discussion of the final *tawqiʿ*, they point out five
discuss the critical sentence (underlined above), a few comments on the final safīr and the interpolation of “second ghayba” (in al-Ṣadūq) to “complete ghayba” (in al-Ṭūsī) are in order.

3.3.1. The Final Representative of the Hidden Imam

ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī is a mysterious figure indeed. Virtually nothing is known about the last person who is said to have been in regular contact with the Hidden during the Lesser Occultation. The only information given about him in the 5th/11th century rijāl works is that (1) he was originally one of the companions of the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī and (2)
he succeeded al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ (or Rawḥ) al-Nawbakhtī (d. 326/938)\textsuperscript{392} as the fourth safīr of the Imam.\textsuperscript{393} However, there is no early textual evidence for either; unlike other agents and representatives of the Imam, his name is not mentioned in any of the works that have survived from the Lesser Occultation (including al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī or Ibn Bābūya’s al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra) nor in al-Nuʿmāni’s Kitāb al-ghayba; moreover, unlike the previous sufarā,\textsuperscript{394} there are no letters from the Imam announcing that he was the successor to the third safīr. In fact, there appears to have been serious doubts about al-Samurī’s claim to be the Imam’s representative. Al-Ṭūsī recounts several theurgic acts (karāmāt) attributed to him as evidence of his being a safīr, including that he magically announced the precise moment when Ibn Bābūya died.\textsuperscript{394} Here, we must at least entertain the probability that these putative miracles were meant to prove his station to some who questioned his authority.


\textsuperscript{393} Al-Shirāzī, Kalimat al-Imām al-Mahdī, 104; al-Ṣadr, Tārikh al-ghayba al-ṣughrā, 412-3; Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 96, who says that he “belonged to the close associates of al-ʿAskarī”; but again, in the absence of evidence, this statement is pure speculation.

As a historical figure, al-Samuri “is essentially on the record for performing a single task: the abolition of the short-lived institution of sīfāra.” Yet it is not clear why the system of the sīfāra was abandoned in favor of the idea of a second ghayba during which there would no longer be any sūfarāʾ. Amir Arjomand speculates that “it is not unreasonable to regard Samari [sic] as a cipher for the failed project to institutionalize central hierocratic authority in the form of sīfāra.” We know that there were others who claimed to be the deputy (wakīl) or gate (bāb) of the Hidden Imam both before al-Samuri’s death (such Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj and al-Shalmaghānī) and shortly after (viz., the nephew of the second safīr, Abū Bakr al-Baghdādi), as well as at least one claimant to being the Hidden Imam himself.

397 Iqbāl, Khāndān-i Nawbakhti, 111-6 (regarding al-Ḥallāj), 222-39 (al-Shalmaghānī); Massignon, La Passion de Husayn Ibn Mansur Hallaj, 1:362, 373, 376-7 (al-Ḥallāj); Amir Arjomand, The Shadow of God, 42. Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 397-412, mentions six “imprecated” individuals in the chapter of his work titled, “Mention of the disgraced ones (al-madhımūmīn; cf. Qur’an 17:22, as opposed to the sūfarāʾ who are called ‘the praised ones’ (al-mahmūdīn) who falsely claimed to be the gate of the Imam (al-bābiyya) and his safīr.” See also Majlisi, ʿAyn al-ḥayāt, 1198-1201.
In the final *tawqiʿ* announcing the second *ghayba*, we see the reflection of a community that had lost hope in his speedy appearance. By the time of al-Samuri, it had become seemingly impossible to keep up the pretense of direct communication with an absent Imam. Perhaps of greater significance is the religious and political context which was marked by an active Ismāʿīli *daʿwa* which, as we mentioned, emerged shortly after the death of al-ʿAskarī and was gaining ground in the central Islamic lands. The Ismāʿīli *duʿā(t)* preached political and military action (led by a Caliph-Imam no less in the case of the Fatimid Ismāʿīlis) in contradistinction to the political quietism practiced by the now Twelver Shiʿa which certainly must have pleased the ruling pro-Shiʿi Buyids. The Buyids were likely Zaydi Shiʿa but the Twelver belief in the *ghayba* of the Imam and thus an invisible and depoliticized ruler appealed to them politically. Consequently, they extended patronage to Twelver Shiʿi scholars.\(^{400}\) That the final *tawqiʿ* of the Hidden Imam sundering all contact with him is said to have been produced less than five years before the Buyids seized control of central Iraq is of no minor note. The Twelver Shiʿi authorities in Iraq who had supported the institution of *siṭāra* decided it was more prudent for

the Shi'a to have an invisible and more importantly, unreachable, divine guide to whom they could keep their spiritual allegiance rather than continue the failing and politically hazardous experiment of having living representatives for the Imam. It was then left to Shi'i Traditionists such as al-Nu'mānī and al-Ṣadūq to justify this shift. The continued existence and growth of the Twelver Shi'i Islam proved that this decision kept the nascent community intact.

3.3.2. From the Second Ghayba to the Complete Ghayba

The most reliable edition of Kamāl al-dīn was prepared by ‘Ali-Akbar al-Ghaffārī who consulted seven different manuscripts. In a footnote to the locution, “the second ghayba” (al-ghayba al-thāniyya), al-Ghaffārī notes that “some manuscripts” have “the complete occultation” (al-ghayba al-tāmma).401 Al-ghayba al-tāmma is almost certainly a later redaction introduced either by al-Ṭūsī or the unnamed group (al-jamāʿa) that transmitted the hadith to him from al-Ṣadūq. This interpolation was likely later reintroduced into some manuscripts of al-Ṣadūq’s Kamāl al-dīn to make it conform with the version in al-Ṭūsī’s Kitāb al-ghayba since it would be highly unlikely for al-ghayba al-tāmma to be changed to al-ghayba al-thāniyya. Al-

401 Al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn', 2:516 (note 1). The oldest manuscript available to me, from the 12th/18th century has “the complete ghayba” (al-ghayba al-tāmma), al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn (ms. 1), folio 330. Cf. a lithograph printed in Iran in 1301/1883 which has “the second ghayba” (al-ghayba al-thāniyya), al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn (ms. 2), folio 284. Pahlavān’s Persian translation of Kamāl al-dīn also has “second
Ṭūsī’s version was cited by Aḥmad al-Ṭabarsī (d. late 6th/12th cent.; on whom, see chapter 4) in his *al-Iḥtijāj ʿalā ahl al-lajāj* and subsequently by most Imāmī scholars that followed, though a small number have preserved al-Ṣadūq’s *al-ghayba al-thāniyya*. This interpolation is significant in that neither al-Nuʿmānī nor al-Ṣadūq ever mention the notion of a “complete *ghayba*.“ This term was in fact completely foreign to them and is not found in any of their writings. On the other hand, both al-Nuʿmānī and al-Ṣadūq use the expression, “the second *ghayba,*” throughout their works.

3.4. Lying Impostors

Initially, the final *tawqīʿ* of the Imam was understood to mean that no one could claim to see the Imam after the start of the second *ghayba*. Al-Ṣadūq devoted a lengthy chapter in his extended defense of the *ghayba* to accounts of those who had seen and spoken with the Hidden

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403 Sachedina’s mention of Complete Occultation (Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 100) when speaking about al-Nuʿmānī and al-Ṣadūq is thus incorrect.

404 See, e.g., al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 1:139, 1:146 and the examples provided above in al-Nuʿmānī’s *Kitāb al-ghayba*.  

Imam (bāb man shāhada al-qāʿim wa-raʿāhu wa-kallamahu). The chain of transmission and text of these accounts reveals that all of them – without exception – are from the Lesser Occultation.

Here, the position of scholars (both western and traditional) who have claimed that al-Ṣadūq (and al-Ṭūsī after him) cites accounts of contact with the Imam from the Greater Occultation needs to be corrected. Amir-Moezzi, for example, has argued that although al-Ṣadūq cites the final tawqīʿ of the Imam in his Kamāl al-dīn, he “does not hesitate to relate in the same work some accounts of meetings with the Hidden Imam after his Major Occultation [i.e., during the second ghayba – again the term “major occultation” is never used by al-Ṣadūq].” Based on this premise, which we will return to presently, Amir-Moezzi confidently asserts:

It is important to note that Ebn Bābuya [al-Ṣadūq], who reports this letter [i.e., the final tawqīʿ] in his Kamāl al-dīn, does not hesitate to relate in the same work some accounts of meetings with the Hidden Imam after his Major Occultation. From the very

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405 On information about surviving manuscripts of Kamāl al-dīn in Iran, see Tafaḍḍuli, Kitābšināsī-i nuskhahā-yi khaṭṭī-i āthār-i Shaykh Ṣadūq dar Iran, 206-28.

406 The same is the case with the reports mentioned in the two chapters in al-Mufīd Kitāb al-irshād, 2:351-67 and al-Ṭūsī Kitāb al-ghayba, 253-84 on those who saw the twelfth Imam or witnessed his miracles (muʿjizātihi) (on both of these books, see below). All of these accounts date from the Lesser Occultation. Some of these accounts are found in al-Kulaynī’s al-Kāfī.

beginning, ocular vision of the imam, to which the (final *tawqi*”) refers, seems to have been understood not in a general sense, but as a condition of the Hidden Imam’s representative. Thus, what is declared impossible during the major occultation (thus until the end of time) is not an encounter with the Hidden Imam as such, but laying claim to the *niāba* [sic] of the latter by citing a meeting with the Hidden Imam as grounds. A believer may be granted the privilege of meeting the Imam, but if following this he declares himself to be the ‘representative’ of the Imam due to the encounter, he is considered (according to terms of the letter) no less than a liar and impostor.  

There are two critical problems with this argument: First, the interpretation that the *tawqi*” means that believers can see the Imam as long as they do not claim to be his representative is not advanced until some eight hundred years after the beginning of the ghayba

by the Safavid savant Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (on whom, see chapter 4). Amir-Moezzi is in essence attempting to read this interpretation back into the earlier sources. Elsewhere, he has argued that, “The last letter of the twelfth imam will cut to the quick: not only will there not be a ‘representative,’ but no one but an impostor will claim to be one.” But is this the case? The tawqīf does not declare that anyone who claims to be the Imam’s representative is a lying impostor; it says that anyone who claims to have seen him is one. To support his contention that from the beginning of the Greater Occultation, this important sentence of the tawqīf was understood to mean that no one could simultaneously claim to see the Imam and be his representative (as opposed to just seeing the Imam), Amir-Moezzi alleged that al-Ṣadūq

409 Amir-Moezzi, “Islam in Iran vii: The Concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shi’ism,” Elr, 11:140, cites al-Murtaḍā and Ibn Ṭāwūs as the two other scholars ante-al-Majlisī who advanced this interpretation; however, the works he references have been closely consulted and do not contain the niyāba interpretation.


411 It seems that Amir-Moezzi wishes to read the critical sentence of the tawqīf declaring anyone who claims to have seen the Imam a liar the way it is read by contemporary Shi‘i scholar, Javād Mu‘allim, in his attempt to reconcile the tawqīf and the many stories of ulama who have claimed to have encountered the Hidden Imam in the modern period. Mu‘allim intentionally distorts the meaning of the sentence in his Persian translation of the tawqīf: “Whoever claims to have seen me in the same manner that you, the four representatives, saw me, which was of your own volition [i.e., anytime the sufarā‘ wanted to meet with the Imam, they could], is a liar and a charlatan.” Nahāvandī, Barakāt-i ḥadrat-i vali-i ‘aṣr, 13 (from the intro by Mu‘allim). In a footnote, Mu‘allim adds that in translating the tawqīf, he has used other
records accounts in his *Kamāl al-dīn* of sightings of the Imam from after the Lesser Occultation. Whether he realized it or not, Amir-Moezzi is here repeating an argument put forward by the Qajar Traditionist Nūrī (d. 1320/1902) and repeated by contemporary ‘grand ayatollah’ Luṭf Allāh al-Ṣāfī al-Gulpāyigānī (b. 1336/1918), both of whom allege that al-Ṭūsī (rather than al-Ṣadūq), who as we have seen, also recorded the final *tawqīʿ*, ignored the critical sentence about “lying impostors” and included stories of Greater Occultation encounters with the Imam in his *Kitāb al-ghayba* (on which, see below). 412 But this position does not stand the test of scrutiny.

In his “Contribution á la Typologie des Rencontres avec l’Imâm Caché,” Amir-Moezzi cited two accounts from al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn* which he maintains took place during the second *ghayba*: 1) the account of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār and 2) an account of a believer hadiths/reports (*rivāyāt-i dīgarī*) on the same issue but he fails to provide any further information about these hadiths. See also *idem*, 74 (note 1).

412 See al-Nūrī, *Jannat al-maʾwā*, 146; al-Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 400 (note 1). Before these scholars, the Safavid scholar Mīr-Lawḥī Sabzavārī, *Kitāyat al-muhtadi*, 638 (on him, see below) likewise claimed that accounts of Greater Occultation encounters with the Imam are transmitted in *Kamāl- al-dīn*, though he does not provide any specific examples.

413 Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 129 (Récit d’Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī b. Mahziyār (IV/Xe s.)).
from Hamadān who was saved from sure death in the desert. A close look at both accounts, however, suggests strongly that they are in fact from the period of the Lesser Occultation.

(1) The story of ʿAli b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī begins when a stranger appears to him in a dream and commands him to perform the hajj, promising that he will meet the Hidden Imam in Mecca. Upon waking, al-Ahwāzī sets out at once from his native ʿIrāq for the Hijāz. One night in Mecca, while circumambulating the Kaʿba, he sees “a comely and sweet-smelling youth wearing a mantle.” The youth knows al-Ahwāzī and his family though al-Ahwāzī has not furnished any evidence) is the story of a Shīʿī who was saved by the Imam from dying of thirst in the desert after having lost his caravan, Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 128. This account is first cited (and translated into Persian) in Mīr Lawḥī Sabzavārī’s (fl. 11th/17th cent) Kifāyat al-muhtadī fī maʿrīfat al-mahdī, 583-4, citing as his source al-Ḥasan b. Ḥamza al-ʿAlawī al-Ṭabarī’s (fl. 4th/10th cent.) Kitāb al-ghayba which has not survived. However, it is important to note that Sabzavārī has not mentioned this account in the chapter of his work dealing with Greater Occultation accounts, suggesting very strongly that he regarded the account as a Lesser Occultation story. The only other Shīʿī scholar I am aware of who has cited this account is the contemporary cleric Luṭf Allāh al-Ṣāfī al-Gulpāyigānī, Muntakhab al-athar, 391, citing as his source Arbaʿīn-i al-Khāṭūnābādī, which is a reference to the prominent Isfahani Qajar scholar Mīr Muhammad Ṣādiq Khāṭūnābādī’s (d. 1272/1856) collection of forty hadiths also known as Kasf al-ḥaqq (on this work, see the appendix). Al-Gulpāyigānī places the account in the chapter of his work on miracles performed by the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation and states in a footnote, idem (note 1), that in all likelihood the story is from the Lesser Occultation.

414 Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 128 (Récit de l’homme des Banī Rāshid de Hamadān (IV/Xe siècle)). Corbin likewise placed this account in the Greater Occultation and provided an abridged translation in Corbin, “Au Pays de l’Imâm caché,” 76-9; repeated with minor differences in Corbin, En Islam iranien, 4:374-6 (in the chapter called, “Au temps de la « Grande Occultation »”). See also Corbin, “Mundus Imaginalis,” 29-30. A third account from the 4th/10th century (though not found in al-Ṣadūq’s Kamāl al-dīn) which Amir-Moezzi placed in the Greater Occultation (though again, without furnishing any evidence) is the story of a Shīʿī who was saved by the Imam from dying of thirst in the desert after having lost his caravan, Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 128. This account is first cited (and translated into Persian) in Mīr Lawḥī Sabzavārī’s (fl. 11th/17th cent) Kifāyat al-muhtadī fī maʿrīfat al-mahdī, 583-4, citing as his source al-Ḥasan b. Ḥamza al-ʿAlawī al-Ṭabarī’s (fl. 4th/10th cent.) Kitāb al-ghayba which has not survived. However, it is important to note that Sabzavārī has not mentioned this account in the chapter of his work dealing with Greater Occultation accounts, suggesting very strongly that he regarded the account as a Lesser Occultation story. The only other Shīʿī scholar I am aware of who has cited this account is the contemporary cleric Luṭf Allāh al-Ṣāfī al-Gulpāyigānī, Muntakhab al-athar, 391, citing as his source Arbaʿīn-i al-Khāṭūnābādī, which is a reference to the prominent Isfahani Qajar scholar Mīr Muhammad Ṣādiq Khāṭūnābādī’s (d. 1272/1856) collection of forty hadiths also known as Kasf al-ḥaqq (on this work, see the appendix). Al-Gulpāyigānī places the account in the chapter of his work on miracles performed by the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation and states in a footnote, idem (note 1), that in all likelihood the story is from the Lesser Occultation.
never met him. He guides al-Ahwāzī out of Mecca and they ride to the mountains of Ṭāʾīf. The youth points to a tent bursting with light pitched on a nearby hill. As the two approach the tent, the youth turns to al-Ahwāzī and declares, “This land is sacred. Only a friend of God (wali) enters it and only a friend of God takes leave from it.” The youth enters the tent and instructs al-Ahwāzī to do the same. As soon as al-Ahwāzī enters, he beholds the Imam:

I entered into his presence and found him seated on a rug with brown and red-coloured spots, reclining on a pillow. We greeted each other. I looked at him closely and saw a face as luminous as the moon. He was strong yet refined and mild-tempered, not too tall and not too short. He was of medium build and possessed a broad forehead, beautifully arched eyebrows, deep-black and large eyes, an aquiline nose, and two smooth cheeks with a birthmark on the right. As I looked at him, my mind was lost in his features.

The Imam proceeds to tell al-Ahwāzī to prepare the Shi’a for the uprising (al-khurūj) and yearn for the portents of the ẓuhūr for the “the Hour is night” (Qur’an 54:1).

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415 Cf. the tabernacle or tent of meeting where Moses would meet with God (Exodus passim). In a hadith found in several early sources, the twelfth Imam is said to have a residence called bayt al-ḥamd (cf. al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 3:219) with a light inside that will continue to shine until he rises with the sword, see al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 245 (no. 31); al-Masʿūdī (attributed), Ithbāt al-waṣīyya, 267; al-Ṭusī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 467. On the motif of light and the Hidden Imam, see Ghaemmaghami, “{And the Earth will Shine with the Light of its Lord} (Q 39:69): qāʾim and qiyāma in Shiʿi Islam.”

416 Cf. the words spoken to Moses as he approached the Burning Bush, Exodus 3:4-5 and Qur’an 20:12.

417 Al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 424-7 (no. 23); al-Bahrānī, Tabṣirat al-walī, 109-15 (no. 49); al-Majlīṣī, Biḥār al-awnawr, 52:42-6 (no. 32). The account is referred to in passing in Amir Arjomand, “Imam Absconditus and the Beginnings of a Theology of Occultation,” 6; Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period,” 268. The text is ambiguous on whether the youth is the Imam or a different person. All scholars who have commented on this account or translated it into Persian
Three other stories very similar to the above in content are mentioned in the early sources:

(1) The story of Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār. This account, also mentioned by al-Ṣadūq, is very similar to the above account but features the jarring presence of a brother of the Hidden Imam in his tent named Mūsā.\footnote{Al-Ṣadūq, \textit{Kamāl al-dīn}, 408-14 (no. 19); al-Baḥrānī, \textit{Tabṣiṣrat al-walī}, 80-90 (no. 46); al-Majlisī, \textit{Biḥār al-anwār}, 52:32-7 (no. 28); Nūrī-Ṭabarṣī, \textit{Kifāyat al-muwahhidin fī ʿaqāyīd al-dīn}, 2:809-11. Al-Shaftī, \textit{Kitāb al-ghayba}, 1:360-2 (no. 360), records the account in the chapter of his work on those who met the Imam during the Lesser Occultation. Sabzavārī, \textit{Kifāyat al-muḥtadī}, 641, identifies Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār and his son Muḥammad as two of the Imam’s representatives during the Lesser Occultation.}


(3) A third story of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār.\footnote{Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, \textit{Dalāʾil al-īmāma}, 539-42 (no. 522); al-Baḥrānī, \textit{Tabṣiṣrat al-walī}, 143-7 (no. 60); al-Baḥrānī, \textit{Madīnat al-maʿājiz}, 8:115-8 (no. 2732). A shortened version of this report is recorded in al-Ḥillī’s \textit{Mukhtaṣar al-baṣāʾīr}, 176-7, citing his teacher al-Nīlī as his source. See also al-Nīlī, \textit{al-Sulṭān al-mufarrīj}, 92-3 (account 16).}

The identity of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī has been a subject of debate among Shiʿī scholars. A ʿAlī b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī is identified in the \textit{rijāl} works as a non-

\footnote{Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, \textit{Dalāʾil al-īmāma}, 539-42 (no. 522); al-Baḥrānī, \textit{Tabṣiṣrat al-walī}, 143-7 (no. 60); al-Baḥrānī, \textit{Madīnat al-maʿājiz}, 8:115-8 (no. 2732). A shortened version of this report is recorded in al-Ḥillī’s \textit{Mukhtaṣar al-baṣāʾīr}, 176-7, citing his teacher al-Nīlī as his source. See also al-Nīlī, \textit{al-Sulṭān al-mufarrīj}, 92-3 (account 16).}
Arab client (mawlá) from Ahwāz and a companion of the eighth and ninth Imams. The early sources identify him as the son of a Christian convert from India⁴²¹ and a prolific author of some 31 books (none of which have survived).⁴²² Ibn Bābūya (father of al-Ṣadūq) states that he is the brother of Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār⁴²³ who is listed by al-Ṭūsī as one of the companions of the ninth and tenth Imams,⁴²⁴ and who was likely the father of the ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī mentioned in the above account. ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār’s brother, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār (also called Muḥammad b. Mahziyār) was a close deputy (wakīl) of the eleventh Imam⁴²⁵ who is said to have had doubts about his successor before witnessing a


⁴²² A Kitāb al-malāḥim (Book of End-Times Calamities) and Kitāb al-Qāʾīm (Book of the Qāʾīm) are ascribed to him, almost certainly written to refute the Wāqīṭī claims about Mūsā al-Kāẓim and cited as evidence of the fact that he “played a key role in the reception of chiliastic traditions into the Imami corpus,” Amir-Arjomand, “The Crisis of the Imamate,” 500. See also Hussain, The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, 4; Watt, “Sidelights on Early Imāmīte Doctrine,” 294; Buyukkara, “The Schism in the Party of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and the Emergence of the Wāqīṭā,” 92; Amir-Moezzi, Le Guide divin 251.

⁴²³ Ibn Bābūya, al-Imāma wa-l-taḥṣīra min al-ḥayra, 201 (no. 56). He also narrates from ʿAlī b. Mahziyār in idem, 234 (no. 83).

⁴²⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, Rijāl al-Ṭūsī, 374, 383.

⁴²⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, Rijāl al-Ṭūsī, 402, who mentions that he was one of the companions of Ḥasan al-ʿAskari; al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 406 (n. 16) > al-Nili, Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍīʿa, 295; al-Amin, Aʿyān al-Shiʿa, 2:71; al-Shīrāzī, Kalimat al-Imām al-Mahdī, 109. See also Sabzavārī, Kitāyat al-muḥtadī, 638, who identifies Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār as the deputy of the Imam in Ahwāz.
miracle which he attributed to the Hidden Imam’s miraculous powers. Moreover, a ʿAlī b. Mahziyār is mentioned as one of the servants of Ḩasan al-ʿAskarī who aided in hiding the twelfth Imam during al-ʿAskarī’s lifetime.

Nūrī mentions the names of Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār and ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār as two of the individuals who encountered the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation but is quick to add that in his opinion, a mistake (isthibāh) has been made in one of these names and that in fact, all the accounts refer to a single person (an agent of the eleventh Imam who likewise met the twelfth Imam) and a single episode. To our knowledge, other than Amir-Moezzi, no other scholar has placed any of the above four accounts in the Greater Occultation and since Amir-Moezzi has not provided any evidence for his argument, it is difficult to assess. In fact, every scholar who has mentioned these accounts has placed them in the Lesser Occultation.

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426 Al-Kulaynī, al-Kāfī, 1:518 (no. 5); al-Mufīd, al-Irshād, 2:355-6; Newman, Formative Period, 151. This account is repeated in numerous works in chapters about the miracles performed by the Hidden during the Lesser Occultation. See al-Nili, Muntakhab al-anwār al-μuḍīʾa, 215 (note 8) for references.

427 See Nahāvandī, Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i vali-i ʿaṣr, 106-8.

428 Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 1:448.

429 See e.g., al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdi, Ilzām al-nāṣib, 1:328, and the references provided in the above accounts.
(2) The only other encounter with the Hidden Imam recorded by al-Ṣadūq that Amir-Moezzi (and Corbin before him) maintained occurred during the Greater Occultation is that of Aḥmad b. Fāris al-Adīb. Al-Ṣadūq says that he heard this account from one of his teachers (shaykh), a scholar of hadith (aḍḥāb al-hadīth) named Aḥmad b. Fāris al-Adīb, likely a reference to the man of letters, Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Fāris b. Zakariyyā al-Qazwī al-Rāzī (fl. 4th/10th cent.).

According to this account, while in Hamadān, al-Adīb heard a story about a group of people known as the Banū Rāshid who were all Shīʿa (ahl al-imāma). When asked about how they became Shīʿa, one of their elders narrated a story about one of their ancestors (jadd) who became separated from his caravan while undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca. Suddenly, this pilgrim reached a green land (ard khadrāʾ) with a luminous palace (qasr) guarded by two white servants (khādimayn abyaḍayn). After receiving permission to enter the palace, he entered a room with a large sword hanging from the ceiling. It is here that he encountered a youth (fatā) described as being as luminous as the full-moon (ka-anna al-fatā badrma yalūḥ). The youth introduced himself as the Qāʾim who will appear at the End of Time.

430 He was a teacher of the famed Arabo-Persian litterateur Aḥmad Badiʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008) and a specialist of grammar. See al-ʿAmin, Aʿyān al-shīʿa, 3:60-2; al-Shāhrūdī, Mustadrak safīnat al-biḥār, 8:177; research note in al-Bahraini, Tabṣirat al-walī, 90 (note 10); and al-Khūʾī, Muʿjam rijāl al-ḥadīth, 2:199, who indicates that al-Adīb lived for some time in Hamadān before moving to
with the sword above his head to fill the world with justice and equity. He then asked the pilgrim from Hamādān (who he knew intimately) if he wished to return to his family. Signaling one of his servants to take the pilgrim’s hand, he gave him a purse and walked with him a few feet. As they walked, the man saw trees and the minaret of a mosque. The servant asked him, “Do you recognize this place?” He answered, “Near our city is a town called Asadābad which resembles this area.” The servant responds, “This is Asadābad!” The man looked to the place the servant had been standing only to find that he had disappeared. Looking in the purse the servant had given him, he found 40 or 50 dirhams. He then rushed home to his family in Hamadān.431 It is not stated but presumed that after hearing of this incident, the tribe known as Banū Rāshid all converted to Shīʿī Islam.


431 Al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn 414-5 (no. 20). Also cited in al-Ṭūsī, al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib, 605-6 (no. 553); al-Nīlī, al-Sultān al-mufarrij, 62-4 (no. 12); Ardabilī, Ḫadiqat al-Shīʿa, 2:967-9 (Persian); Mīr Lawḥī, Kifāyat al-muḥtadī 634-6 (Persian); al-Majlisī, Biḥār al-anwār, 52:40-2 (no. 30); Majlisi, Ḥaqq al-yaqīn, 339-40 (Persian); al-Bahrānī, Tafsīr al-amīr Shīrāzī, 3:672-3; al-Bahrānī, Tafsīr al-rūh, 6:206-7; al-Bahrānī, Tafsīr al-sayf, 8:430-2; al-Bahrānī, Tafsīr al-šaykh al-Muṣṭafā, 14:288-9; al-Majlisi, al-Ṭahārī, Tabṣirat al-walī, 422-3; al-Majlisi, Tabṣirat al-walī, 90-3; al-Bahrānī, Madīnat al-maʿājīz, 8:183-5 (no. 2781); al-Bahrānī, Ḥilyat al-ṣabr, 5:230-2 (no. 3); al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, Ithbāt al-hudūd, 5:298-9; al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdi, Ilzām al-nāṣib, 1:356-7; al-Qummi, Muntahā al-āmīl fī tawārikh al-nabī wa-l-āl ʿalayhim al-salām, 3:2022-4; Qummi, Nikāhi bar zindig-i chahārdah ma'sum, 559-61 (Persian). The story continues to be very popular and is cited in many contemporary books about the Hidden Imam. See for example, Āl Quṭayṭ, Salī al-mahdī ʿan dawlatihī, 405; ʿĀshūr, Mawsūʿat ahl al-bayt, 19:73-4. A similar account is recorded in al-Rāwandi, al-Kharājīj wa-l-jarāʾīḥ, 2, 788-9 (no. 112) > al-Bahrānī, Tabṣirat al-walī, 204-5 (no. 69). Shūstārī, Majālis al-muʿminīn, 80, alludes to this account in stating that
Prior to Corbin and Amir-Moezzi, only two other scholars placed this story in the period of the second *ghayba*.\(^{432}\) However, this opinion is almost certainly erroneous. There is no date in the account itself but we know that al-Ṣadūq heard it earlier from Ahmad b. Fāris al-Adīb earlier than 368/978-9, when he completed *Kamāl al-dīn*. Based on this fact, we can conclude that al-Adīb in turn heard the story sometime during the last part of the Lesser Occultation or the early years of the Greater Occultation. As we have seen, al-Adīb explicitly says that the account is about the forefather (*jadd*) of the one of the believers in Hamadān. The word *jadd* means both grandfather and a higher ascendant or ancestor.\(^{433}\) Assuming that this *jadd* was not alive when al-Adīb heard the story (since otherwise, al-Adīb would have heard the account directly from the *jadd* rather than an elder of Hamadān), we can be almost certain that the account is from the Lesser Occultation. This is in fact the consensus of scholarly opinion among Shi‘ī scholars about the story: Nūrī recorded the account in chapter six of his *al-Najm al-thāqib* as one of the 40 most popular stories of Lesser Occultation miracles associated with

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\(^{432}\) Al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī, *Ḥadiqat al-Shī‘a*, 967-8; Ḥrāqī-Maythami, *Dār al-salām*, 505, though neither provides any evidence to support the notion that this account belongs in the category of stories of encounters during the Greater Occultation.

\(^{433}\) Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:385.
the Hidden Imam. Moreover, Asad Allāh al-Shaftī (d. 1290/1873) and Ismāʿīl Aḥmad Nūrī-Ṭabarsī (d. 1318/1900-1) likewise recorded the account in the chapters of their respective works dealing with believers who saw and recognized the Imam during the Lesser Occultation, while ʿIrāqī-Maythamī (d. 1306/1888-9, 1308/1890-1 or 1310/1892-3) included the story in the chapter of his tome on the Hidden Imam concerning those who saw the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation or soon after it. Moreover, al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdī (d. 1333/1915) and ʿAbbās al-Qummī (d. 1359/1940) also recorded the story in their works but not in the chapters dealing with accounts of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, suggesting that they too regarded it as a Lesser Occultation encounter.

Furthermore, all of the other 25 accounts in the chapter of al-Ṣadūq’s Kamāl al-dīn on believers who have seen the Imam are from the Lesser Occultation and al-Ṣadūq does not make the slightest hint that the above accounts are an exception. However, al-Ṣadūq does mention one and only one person who saw the Imam during the second ghayba though in a different

434 Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 1:428-30 (no. 27).
436 ʿIrāqī-Maythamī, Dār al-salām, 315-7 (no. 21).
section of his work. That person is none other than himself. In Kamāl al-dīn’s introduction, al-Ṣadūq recounts how one night while he was deeply disturbed by the doubts and confusion that continued to haunt the Shi‘ī community about the Imam’s absence, he dreamt he was standing next to the Black Stone of Ka‘ba. He suddenly saw “our master, the Qā‘im, the lord of the [final] age” standing at the door of the Ka‘ba. The Imam knew why al-Ṣadūq was so despondent merely from looking at his face. He suggested that al-Ṣadūq write a book about the ghayba. When al-Ṣadūq responded that, “I have already written many things about the ghayba” (qad ṣannaftu fī al-ghayba ashyā’), the Imam answered that what al-Ṣadūq (or others) have written was not what he had in mind. He then ordered him (āmuruka) to write a new book that would focus on the Prophets who appeared before him and who had likewise disappeared (ghaybāt al-anbiyā’) or had their lives miraculously prolonged by God. Implicit in al-Ṣadūq’s

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438 Al-Ṣadūq’s words can be alternately translated as: “Many things have already been written about the ghayba [by others]” (qad ṣunnifat fī al-ghayba ashyā’).

439 Al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 15. Referred to in Amir Arjomand, “The Consolation of Theology,” 555; Tafaḍḍuli, Kitābshināsī-i nuskhahā-yi khaṭṭī-i āthār-i Shaykh Ṣadūq dar Iran, 207; al-Jahramī, Ri‘āyat al-Imām al-Mahdī lil-marāji‘ wa-l-ʻulamā’ al-a‘lām, 51-3. Al-Ṣadūq’s dream of the Hidden Imam continues to be adduced by Shi‘i scholars as proof of “the blessings” that have been bestowed on “traditionalists [sic], theologians and scholars, who have compiled comprehensive books on each and every topic concerning Imam-e-Zamana [sic], thereby clarifying the discussions in their entirety.” [Gulpāyigānī], Traditional Reports on the Hidden Imam (A Translation of Muntakhab al Asar) by Ayatullah Lutfullah Safi Gulpaigani (trans. Rizvi), iiii (from the translator’s introduction). Rizvi adds: “The significance of working on this subject can be gauged from the fact that Imam-e-Zamana [sic]
oneiric encounter with the Imam is that he can appear in dreams (at least to al-Ṣadūq). That the Imam can appear only in a dream must certainly have been an innocuous position to advance in the context of Buyid rule when the nascent Twelver Shi'i community was actively attempting to portray itself as apolitical vis-à-vis the Ismāʿīlī Shi'a who posed the greatest political and military challenge to the Buyid confederacy.

3.5. The Instructive Teacher

Following al-Ṣadūq, the most prominent Shi'i teacher and leading Shi'i jurist and theologian of the late 4th/10th century was his student, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmān al-Baghdādī al-Karkhī, known as Ibn al-Muʿallim (lit., son of the teacher, i.e., the second coming of Aristotle) and more commonly al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (“the instructive teacher”) (b. 336/948 or 338/950, d. 413/1022).

During the reign of the Buyid ruler ʿAḍud al-Dawla (d. 372/983), al-Mufid was held in great esteem by the court and was often invited to debate other thinkers. Although the Shi'a enjoyed unprecedented freedoms in Buyid Baghdad, his prominence made him the object of himself ordered Shaikh Saduq to pen a book on occultation.” See also al-Jahrami, Riʿāyat al-Imām al-Mahdi lil-marājiʿ wa-l-ʿulamāʾ al-aʿlām, 51-3.

Although he studied with al-Ṣadūq, al-Mufīd trenchantly criticized him in some of his works. He is widely considered the revivifier of the rationalist orientation that had been in abeyance in Baghdad since the time of the Nawbakhtīs in the early 4th/10th century.\footnote{On the dominance of the Nawbakhtīs in Lesser Occultation Baghdad, in particular its head, the jurist and theologian, Abū Sahl Iṣmāʿīl al-Nawbakhī (d. 311/923-4), see Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shiʿism,” 502-7 and Modarressi, \textit{Crisis and Consolidation}, index, s.v. ‘Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhī’; Klemm, “Die vier sufarāʾ des Zwölften Imām Zur formativen Periode der Zwölferšīʿa,” 139-41 (Abū Sahl Iṣmāʿīl b. ʿAlī an-Naubaḥtī und sein Kreis).} He and his students produced the principles of jurisprudence (\textit{uṣul al-fiqh}) and assigned reason (\textit{al-ʿaql}) a fundamental role in acquiring religious knowledge.\footnote{See Halm, \textit{Shiʿism}, 48-56.} They also severely weakened the school of the Traditionists. In fact, al-Ṣadūq is widely considered the last of the great classical Shīʿī Traditionists.

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Al-Mufid devoted several works to questions of the Imamate and the ghayba. In one of his earlier works, the Kitāb al-irshād, written circa 380/990, he recorded many of the Lesser Occultation encounter accounts that are mentioned by al-Kulaynī though, unlike al-Kulaynī, he did not consider these accounts as the primary proof of the Imam’s existence. In the final chapter of Kitāb al-irshād, he rearticulates (following al-Nuʿmānī) the doctrine of two ghaybas:

وَلَهُ قَبْلَ قِيَامِهِ غَيْبَتَانِ إِخْذَاهاُمَا أَطْوَلُ مِنَ الأَخْرَيْنَ كَمَا جَاعَتُ بَيْنَكِ الأَخْبَارِ فَأَمَّا الْفَصْرُ فَمِنْهَا فَمَنْذٌ وَقَتَّ مُؤْلِدَهُ إِلَى الْقَطْعِ السَّفَارَةِ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ شِيَعُتهُ وَعَدْمِ السُّفْرَاءِ بِالْوَفَاةِ وَأَمَّا الطُّوُلُ فَهيُ بَعْدَ الأَوَّلِ وَفِي أَخْرَهَا بَعْدَ الْوَفَاةِ بِوَسْطِ السَّيْفِ

As has been narrated in the hadiths (of the Imams), before his rise, (the Hidden Imam) has two ghaybas, one longer than the other. As for the shorter of the two, it lasted from (the Imam’s) birth to the point when the function performed by the those who served as representatives between him and his Shīʿa was suspended and there were no longer any representatives because they had all died. As for the longer (ghayba), it was after the first. At the end of it, (the Imam) will rise with the sword.

443 For a list of al-Mufid’s works on the Imamate and the ghayba, based on Rijāl al-Najāshī, see Amīnī, “Kitāb-i ghaybat-i Shaykh Ṭūsī,” 480.

444 Al-Mufid, al-Irshād, 2:351-4. On this work, see Akhtar, Early Shiʿite Imāmiyyah Thinkers, 96-99.

Similar to al-Nuʿmānī, al-Mufid maintains there are no representatives or gates (al-abwāb, another term he uses in the same sense as sufarā)\textsuperscript{446} to establish contact between the Imam and the faithful or impart knowledge to them. He is adamant that the second ghayba could last seemingly forever. In fact, he states elsewhere that the Imam may stay in hiding for a thousand years (wa-law baqiya alfʿām).\textsuperscript{447}

The arguments in al-Mufid’s later works on the ghayba are based on rational proofs (dalāʾil ʿaqliyya as opposed to dalāʾil naqliyya). The previous generation of scholars were not shy about expressing their aversion to the Muʿtazila. Al-Nuʿmānī numbered the Muʿtazila as enemies of the Imams, similar to those who advocate (religious) innovations (al-mubtadiʿīn).\textsuperscript{448} Al-Ṣadūq stated in his Kamāl al-dīn that the harsh attacks of the Muʿtazilites had exacerbated the confusion and doubt that Shīʿa from Baghdad to Nīshāpūr were experiencing, leading many to renounce their beliefs.\textsuperscript{449} By the time of al-Mufid, the traditional arguments furnished by al-

\textsuperscript{446} al-Murtaḍā/[al-Mufid], al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra, 318. This book is a compilation of passages from different works written by al-Mufid (which have otherwise not survived), mainly his al-ʿUyūn wa-l-maḥāsin by his student al-Murtaḍā. See Akhtar, Early Shīʿite Imāmiyyah Thinkers, 188.

\textsuperscript{447} al-Murtaḍā/[al-Mufid], al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra, 319.

\textsuperscript{448} Al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ghayba, 36.

\textsuperscript{449} For references, see Hussain, The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, 144.
Nuʿmānī and al-Ṣadūq were no longer adequate. To defend the doctrine of the ghayba to their rationalist interlocutors, Shiʿī scholars had to adduce strictly rational proofs.

Al-Mufīd does not directly posit the possibility of encountering the Imam in any of his works. In a key doctrinal text, when responding to the question of what proof there is for the Imam’s existence (mā al-dalīl ʿalā wujūdihi), he responds that every age must have an Imam who is protected by God from committing sin (maʿṣūm), emphasizing the key ghayba principle of the Shiʿī rationalists: Ṽlutf or grace from God.450 We might expect here some mention of the Imam appearing to his followers as an evidence of his existence. None is offered.

But can anyone ever see the Imam or benefit from his guidance? Al-Mufīd responds to this question in his defense of the doctrine of the ghayba titled al-Masāʾil al-ʿashar fī al-ghayba,451 one of his last works completed near the end of 411/1021.452 On the question of

450 Al-Mufīd, al-Nukat al-iʿtiqādiyya, 44-5. On the principle of Ṽlutf, see al-Murtaḍā, al-Dhakhīra fī ʿīlm al-kalām, 186-98; Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 20, 124-35 passim; Amir Arjomand, The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam, 44; Halm, Shiʿism, 53. Briefly, the argument stems from the Muʿtazilī principles that (1) God is just and (2) man is responsible for his actions. Since man is prone to error and thus, in need of guidance and the ruling Caliphs are sinful and tyrannical, God’s Ṽlutf (divine grace) obligates Him to provide an authoritative source of guidance at all times in the form of an Imam who He has protected (maʿṣūm) from committing error. If this Imam is not present, he must be in hiding. On the Shiʿī ascription of Īṣma (divine protection from errancy) to the Imams, see Algar, “Čahārdah Maʿṣūm,” EIr, 4:627-9.

451 On this work, see Kadhim, “Politics and Theology of Imāmī Shiʿa in Baghdād in the 5th/11th Century,” 78-80 (his comment that the book was written in 410/1019-20 needs to be corrected). No
seeing the Imam, he responds: “A group of the companions of Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī saw his successor [i.e., the twelfth Imam] with their own eyes (shāhadū khalafahu)⁴⁵³ while al-ʿAskarī was still alive.” These companions were al-ʿAskarī’s elite followers (khāṣṣatahu). After al-ʿAskarī’s death, these same elite companions became “the intermediaries (al-wasāʾīf) between (the twelfth Imam) and his Shīʿa during his ghayba.” Al-Mufīd maintains that the mere fact “that (the Hidden Imam) was seen [by these companions] disproves the enemy who claims, ‘The leader [of the Shiʿa] has not been seen or encountered since his alleged birth.’” But what happened after these companions died? Al-Mufīd goes on to say:

... As for the time after their passing [that is, after the passing of the elite companions and the intermediaries], ... we have hadiths that have been narrated on the authority of the Imams which affirm that the eagerly awaited Qāʾim will have two ghaybas: one longer than the other. [These hadiths state that] the elite (of his followers) possess information about him (yaʿrif khabarahu al-khāṣṣū) during the shorter (ghayba), but the only people who know his location during the longer (ghayba) are those from among his

scholar has discussed al-Mufīd’s writings concerning the question of contacting the Imam but for general comments about his thought regarding the ghayba, see McDermott, The Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), 127-31; Bayhom-Daou, Shaykh al-Mufīd, 77-81. According to McDermott, The Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), 35 (no. 90), 36 (no. 108), al-Mufīd is said to have composed two others work concerning the occultation called Kitāb al-ghayba and Kitāb mukhtaṣar fī al-ghayba neither of which have survived.

⁴⁵² Al-Mufīd, al-Masāʾil al-ʿashar fī al-ghayba, 32.

⁴⁵³ Notice that here al-Mufīd uses the same verb found in the critical sentence of the last tawqīʿ which he likely knew about (having been a student of al-Ṣadūq with access to the latter’s Kamāl al-din) but chose not to cite in any of his works.
most trustworthy friends/initiates who have been entrusted with the task of serving him (man tawallā khidmatahu min thuqāt awliyāʾihi) and who do nothing else but tend to his [daily] needs (lam yanqatiʿ anhu ilā al-īshtighāl bi-ghayrihi).454

Thus, according to al-Mufid’s interpretation of the Shiʿī hadith (and he almost certainly is alluding in the above passage to Hadith 2 and Hadith 3 discussed in chapter 2 of this study), not even all of the elite followers of the Hidden Imam can see him during the second ghayba; the only believers who see him are a very select group of the Imam’s friends who are in fact his servants charged with tending to his personal needs.

In other late works in which he responds to this question, al-Mufid is far from charitable towards his fellow Shiʿa. A Muʿtazili scholar once asked him a question which he had posed to other Shiʿi scholars from Khurasan to Fārs and for which he never received a satisfactory answer: “Does (the Hidden Imam) fear you in the same way that he fears his enemies (hal huwa taqiyya minkum kamā huwa fī taqiyya min aʿdāʾihi)? Or does he fear his enemies only?” In other words, the Muʿtazili was at least willing to understand the rationale for the Imam being forced to hide out of fear from his enemies; but why not appear to his believers, especially at a time (in the context of Buyid rule) when they enjoyed liberties and freedoms unheard of when the ghaybas commenced? Al-Mufid responds that the Imam is in fact fearful of not only his

454 Al-Mufid, al-Masāʾil al-ʿashar fī al-ghayba, 76.
enemies and those who don’t know him but also of his Shīʿa. That he distrusts his enemies is self-evident but the Imam cautiously evades those who don’t know him because they may kill him or turn him over to his enemies in order to receive a monetary reward or some position in the government. Finally, the Imam has reservations about appearing to his Shīʿa because none of the Shīʿa are perfect, that is to say, none of the Imam’s followers are incapable of making a mistake (laysū bi-maʿṣūmin min al-ghalaṭ). If the Imam showed himself to them (law ẓahara lahuma al-imām) and they saw him or they somehow learned his whereabouts (aw ʿarafū makānuhu), they might be tempted by Satan to reveal this to the authorities in their desire for the transitory things of this world (танع في الاجلال ورغبة فيها; cf. Qur’an 17:18, 76:27) as was so often the case with the followers of previous prophets who apostatized their faith (here, he gives the example of the followers of Moses who abandoned him and Aaron and followed al-Sāmārī (Qur’an 20:85-97)).

455 Another follower may unintentionally (ʿalā sabīl al-sahw) tell others that he has seen the Imam or knows his location or seek to parade the fact that he knows he has seen the Imam to others (لإتاجمعل واتشأربف بيمارفاته بلالمushāhada).


456 Al-Murtaḍā/[al-Mufīd], al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra, 115.
In lieu of seeing the Imam, al-Mufid argues that if any differences arise among the Shi‘a or they have any questions about matters of belief, “they must seek the help of the ulama of the Shi‘a and their fiqhāʾ” (yasta‘īnū ... bi-‘ulamā’ al-shī‘a wa-fiqhā’ihim) and if they are not able to find answers to their questions in the Traditions, they may use reason as a source for deriving laws. Thus, the ulama and fiqhāʾ are at once the Imam’s locum tenentes and conduits for his guidance to the faithful.

Al-Mufid’s defense of the ghayba became the framework for the next generation of Twlever Shi‘ī scholars, all of whom were his intellectual agnates. In his statement that a number of believers are in the service of the Imam, we see the first signs of a shift that was made explicit by two of his most prominent students: al-Sharīf al-Murtadā and al-Ṭūsī. Al-Murtadā, al-Ṭūsī and their students all suggested in subtle terms that direct contact with the Hidden Imam was theoretically possible for his closest and most devoted followers before his reappearance. It is to a discussion of their works that we now turn.

3.6. The Banner of Guidance and His Students

457 Al-Mufid, Iddat rasā’īl, 386-7 (from al-risāla al-thāniyya fī al-ghayba).
When al-Mufid died in 413/1022, the mantle of religious authority was passed to his student, al-Sharif al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044).\textsuperscript{458} Al-Murtaḍā, the prodigious man of letters known as ʿAlam al-Hudā (the Banner of Guidance), was the doyen of the renowned Shiʿī scholars of the Buyid period and the “undisputed head of the Imāmī community after the death” of al-Mufid.\textsuperscript{459} With him, the anti-Traditionist, rationalist, and Muʿtazili-leaning orientation of the Shiʿī scholars of Baghdad which al-Mufid had revivified reached its peak.\textsuperscript{460} However, in contrast to his master al-Mufid, who had maintained that reason alone without the aid of inspired tradition (i.e. the aḥādīth of the ahl al-bayt) was insufficient to attain knowledge, al-Murtaḍā affirmed, in full agreement with the Muʿtazila, that “the fundamental truths of religion must be established primarily by reason.”\textsuperscript{461} Al-Murtaḍā’s œuvre deserves much more attention


\textsuperscript{460} On the attempts of the rationalist scholar in Baghdad “to modulate the radicalism” of the Traditionist school of Qum, see Lawson, “Hermeneutics,” \textit{Elr}, 12:235-9.

than it has thus far received. Here we will have to limit our study to his elucidations and teachings about the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam.

Al-Murtaḍā’s views on the Hidden Imam are expressed in several books and treatises.\(^ {462} \)

Importantly, al-Murtaḍā seldom cites from the Traditions introduced in chapters 1 and 2 of our study. His decision to largely censure al-Kulaynī, al-Nuʿmānī and to a lesser extent al-Ṣadūq for filling their compilations with “forged” Traditions averse to reason has been documented by scholars.\(^ {463} \)

Like al-Mufid, al-Murtaḍā’s speculations about the *ghayba* begin with the premise of the Imamate. If a person becomes convinced in the necessity of the Imamate, then the doctrine of the Imam’s *ghayba* is easy to grasp.\(^ {464} \) In his works, al-Murtaḍā gives official sanction for the reports of the Imam making incognito visits to his acolytes or granting audiences to some

\(^{462}\) Cf. the recently published late 6th/12th or early 7th/13th anonymous Shiʿi-Muʿtazilī theological treatise, *Khulāṣat al-naẓar*, which offers a very similar response centered around the principle of *luṭf* (divine grace) but does not even hint at the possibility of Imam appearing to his most elite disciples during the Greater Occultation. See Schmidtk and Ansari, eds., *Khulāṣat al-naẓar*, 171-8, esp. 176.

\(^{463}\) Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin* 32 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 13]; Kohlberg, “Kolayni,” *Elr* (online edition); Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Law*, 41: “he was very critical of the traditionists, and even accused all ‘Qummiyyūn’ of being religious deviationists, with the only exception of al-Ṣadūq, toward whom he adopted a more moderate approach.”

of his followers in the Lesser Occultation by claiming that that the Imam used to appear before his adherents at the beginning of his ghayba, hiding himself from only his enemies; only later (i.e., after the end of the Lesser Occultation), when danger to his life increased did he have to hide from both followers and adversaries. According to al-Murtaḍā, “the Imam hides from his enemies because he must protect himself from them (lil-taqiyya minhum) and he hides from his friends (awliyāʾihi) because he fears for them (lil-taqiyya ʿalayhim)…for if he were to appear to those who affirm his Imamate or to be seen by an enemy who then tells others, his followers would be persecuted; and even if, in these circumstances, the Imam himself managed to evade capture by going back into hiding, these enemies would still inflict grievous harm upon his followers.”

Al-Murtaḍā repeats this same assertion when stating that the Imam will only appear when there is no longer a need for him to be cautious (tazūl ʿanhu al-taqiyya – lit., fear vanishes from him), adding ominously that “(the Imam) is constantly watching us (shāhid

465 We have not been able to find this passage in al-Murtaḍā’s extant writings but al-Ṭabrisī (on whom, see chapter 4) quotes him thus in his Flām al-warā, 2:303. The passage is repeated a century later by al-Irbilī (on whom, see chapter 4), who again attributes it to al-Murtaḍā. See al-Irbilī, Kāshf al-ghuma', 2:1033. The translation here is from Kohlberg, “Taqiyya in Shiʿi Theology and Religion,” 350, slightly revised after consulting the original text.
lanā), he is omnipresent (muḥīṭ binā) and nothing about us is hidden from him (wa-ghayr khāfīn ʿalayhi shayʿa min ahwālinā).”

Using dialectical arguments, in his Masʿala wajīza fī al-ghayba, al-Murtaḍā asserts that indeed, the possibility of the Imam appearing in person to some of his friends cannot be been ruled out: “If it is said: ‘What is the difference between (saying that the Imam) exists or does not exist when he is concealed (ghāʾib) and no one can reach him or benefit from him (lā yaṣīl īlayhi aḥad wa-lā yantafiʿ bihi bashar)...Then it should be said [to those making such objections]: ‘First, we consider it allowable (nujawwiz) that many of his friends (awliyāʾihi) and those who profess his Imamate can reach him, and thus benefit from him...’” Al-Murtaḍā then maintains that the Shiʿa who do not meet the Imam (lā yalqāhu) still benefit from his existence because they will hesitate to commit any reprehensible acts (al-qabāʾiḥ) out of fear of being chastised or reprimanded by the Imam.

466 Al-Murtaḍā, Rasāʾil al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, 1:283.

467 Sachedina, “A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imāmite Imam,” 122 (revised after consulting the original text found in al-Murtaḍā, “Masʿala wajīza fī al-ghayba,” 12; Sachedina calls this treatise Risālat al-ghayba but all other sources refer to it as Masʿala wajīza fī al-ghayba). An almost identical statement is made by al-Murtaḍā in his al-Dhakhīra fī ʿilm al-kalām, 423, in an essay about the proofs of the Imam’s existence.

468 See also al-Murtaḍā, Rasāʾil al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, 3:145. This opinion would be re-expressed by Maytham al-Bahrānī (d. 699/1299-1300) some three centuries later. See al-Oraibi, “Shiʿī Renaissance,” 155-6, and chapter four of this dissertation.
In his *al-Shāfī fī al-Imāma*, written to controvert the chapters on the imamate in the contrarian Mu’tazilite theologian Qāḍī al-Quḍāt ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī’s (d. 415/1024-5) comprehensive anti-Shī‘ī (or more appropriately, anti-Twelver-Shī‘ī) polemic and exposition of Mu’tazili kalām, the *Kitāb al-mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl*, al-Murtaḍā modulates his position and maintains: “We cannot be certain (*lasnā naqṭa‘*) that the Imam will not appear to some of his friends (*awliyā‘*) and Shī‘a. In fact, (the Imam appearing to some) remains a possibility but it is also possible that he will not appear to any of them. Each person only knows about his own self (*laysa yaʿrif kull wāḥid minnā illā ḥāl nafsihi*) and it’s not possible for him to know about anyone else (*fā-amma ḥāl ghayrihi fā-ghayr maʿlūm lahu*).” It is worth noting that al-Murtaḍā’s explanation is not the first he gives in discussing the rationale for the *ghayba*. It is not even the second. In fact, he concedes that the main reason he is mentioning this possibility is to attenuate ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī’s argument of why the Imam does not appear to his followers now that he is no longer facing the same threats to his life that he faced when the *ghayba* began in the pre-Buyid period. Satisfied with this “solution”


to an ostensibly insoluble problem, al-Murtaḍā concludes, “Since we deem it possible that (the Imam) may appear to some of (the Shi’a), or even all of them, we see no reason to mention the rationale preventing his appearance (al-‘illā al-māni’a ʿan al-zuhūr).”

Responding to the same question in his Tanzīh al-anbiyāʾ, al-Murtaḍā is more reticent.472 Posing the question of what difference is there between the Imam’s existence and nonexistence when no one can reach him and benefit from him while he is in ghayba, he retorts, “We cannot say with certainty (innā ghayr qāṭiʿīn) that the no one can reach the Imam or encounter him (yalqāhu) because this matter is unknown and there is no way to be certain one way or another (fā-hādhā al-amr ghayr maʿlūm wa-lā sabīl ilā al-qatʿ ʿalayhi).”

Nevertheless, “the possibility” that the Imam may appear in person to “some of his friends has not been ruled out.”474 He then refers to his earlier argument in al-Shāfī fī al-Imāma emphasizing that it is not possible to be certain about the matter either way and that “each of the Imam’s Shi’a can only answer for himself [whether he has seen the Imam or not].

471 Al-Murtaḍā, al-Shāfī fī al-imāma, 1:149.

472 As the title suggests, the central theme of Tanzīh al-anbiyāʾ is the doctrine of ʿiṣma. For general comments about this work, see Bar-Asher, Scripture and Exegesis, 173-9.


is no way he can answer for anyone else.”⁴⁷⁵ Al-Murtaḍā is implying in these statements, in very subtle terms, that even if someone meets the Imam, it would not be seemly to divulge this fact to others nor would it be appropriate for others to question the veracity of someone who has claimed to have seen the Imam. Although he does not cite the last tawqīʿ of the Imam in any of his works, it appears that he has the critical sentence of the tawqīʿ in mind in these statements. In other words, certain believers can see the Imam but no one should claim this publicly.

The final work in which al-Murtaḍā deals with the question is his al-Muqniʿ fi al-ghayba. Although we do not know when this work was written, it is clear that it is one of his later works since he refers in it to al-Shāfīʿ fi al-imāma and Tanzih al-anbiyāʾ. In the introduction, al-Murtaḍā explains that questions about the ghayba of the Imam of the Age arose at a meeting with a Buyid minister, requiring him to respond in brief.⁴⁷⁶ That the explanations offered in al-Muqniʿ fi al-ghayba were held in high esteem by future generations of scholars and are cited in part or in toto by, among others, al-Ṭūsī in his Kitāb al-ghayba, al-Ṭabrisī in...
his *I‘lām al-warā bi-a‘lām al-hudā*, and al-Majlisi in his *Biḥār al-anwār*, is a tribute to al-Murtaḍā’s perceived intellectual prowess vis-à-vis defending the doctrine of *ghayba*.

On the question of seeing the Imam, al-Murtaḍā again poses the hypothetical question encountered above of what the difference is between the Imam existing or not when no one can reach him and benefit from him during his *ghayba*. He responds, “Before we answer this question, it must be stated that it cannot be said with certainty (*mā yuqṭa‘*) that no one reaches the Imam or encounters him because this matter is hidden from us (*hādhā al-amr mughayyab ʿannā*) and steeped in uncertainty.” Elsewhere, he asks: “If we accept that the rationale for (the Imam’s) *ghayba* from his enemies is that he feared them, then why does he not [at least] appear to his friends? This rationale does not apply to them, right?” Al-Murtaḍā begins his response by saying that other ulama (he is referring here to al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufīd) have already answered this question by arguing that if the Imam appeared to some of his friends, they might reveal his location or be unable to conceal their joy of seeing the Imam to his enemies. However, al-Murtaḍā does not find this response convincing. Even if the concern may exist for one or two of the Shi‘a to act unwisely, it does not apply to the overwhelming majority of Shi‘a who would never reveal their encounters with the Imam since they appreciate

the risks that this would pose to the Imam’s life. Al-Murtaḍā elaborates on this point in the book’s addendum (*takmil*). He addresses the question of how the believers can benefit from the Imam when he is concealed. His very telling response follows:

Those loyal to the Imām of the Age, his Shiʿa and the believers in his imamate, benefit from him during his *ghaybah*, the kind of benefit which - we say - is necessary under an obligation to fulfill one’s religious duties (*taklīf*); because, knowing that he is among them and believing with certainty in their obligation to obey him, they must revere and fear him upon [intending] to perpetrate evil deeds. They fear his discipline, reproach and punishment. Hence, their fulfillment of duties will increase and their evil deeds will decrease, which is more proper; and this is the rational need for the Imam after all.\(^{478}\)

Thus, al-Murtaḍā argues that whereas it is possible for the Imam to appear to his friends (awliyā’) in order to admonish, discipline or educate them, the Imam is never obligated (*ghayr wājib*) to do so just as the Shiʿa are not obligated to search for reasons why he does not appear if he chooses not to.\(^{479}\) Al-Murtaḍā here is essentially arguing that there is no need to see the Imam. His concealed presence is enough to preclude the Shiʿa from committing heinous acts or failing to fulfill their religious obligations.

While the arguments advanced by al-Murtaḍā do not amount to *volte-face* on the question of seeing the Imam, they do signify a clear discontinuity. Like al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ṣadūq

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and al-Mufid before him, al-Murtadā does not mention any accounts of encounters with the Imam during the second *ghayba* in any of his works. Yet unlike al-Nuʻmânī, al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufid who maintained that the Imam cannot be seen (at least not in a wakeful state in the case of al-Ṣadūq and with the exception of some of his servants in the case al-Mufid), al-Murtadā argued again and again that it is indeed possible for the Imam to appear to his Shi‘a though the question ultimately remains shrouded in uncertainty.

Al-Murtadā’s influence over the next generation of Shi‘i scholars is impossible to overestimate. Taking advantage of the greater freedoms afforded to them by the Buyid rulers, many of his students settled in Iran, parts of Iraq and the Levant to promulgate Twelver Shi‘i thought. Three of these students have left works that deal specifically with the question of whether it is possible to see and recognize the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation and it is a discussion of their responses to this question that we now turn.

3.6.1. Al-Karājukī

The first student was Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥammad b. ʿAli b. ʿUthmān al-Karājukī (d. 449/1057), a jurist, astronomer, medical doctor and theologian.\(^480\) After studying in Baghdad under al-Mufid

\(^{480}\) The best biography of this scholar is found in al-Karājukī, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, 1:11-25 (from the publisher’s introduction). His name is often misspelled al-Karājkī, al-Karājikī, al-Karāchakī or al-Karākji in western sources (where there been little discussion of him), but the correct vocalization is al-
and later al-Murtadā, al-Karājūkī returned to his home in Tripoli on the Lebanese coast where he taught and served as a jurist. At the time, Tripoli was under Fatimid control and dominated by Ismāʿīli scholars. Al-Karājūkī’s *Kanz al-fawāʿid*, an anthology of his writings peppered with long passages from the works of his teachers is considered a major source for Shiʿī theology.\(^{481}\)

The work reflects the intense debates al-Karājūkī was undertaking with not only Ismāʿīli scholars, but also Muʿtazilites, Ashʿarīs, Jews and Christians. Two chapters of this work are devoted to the Hidden Imam and to defending the doctrine of ghayba. Al-Karājūkī’s defense centers around the principle of self-protection: the Imam, as all previous prophets and messengers who disappeared for a time, was forced into hiding because of the threat posed by the oppressors who sought to kill him (*inna al-sabab fī ghaybat al-imām ikhāfa al-zālimīn lahu wa-ṭabuhum bi-safk damihi*).\(^{482}\) In the chapter on the twelfth Imam, after explaining that the Imam was forced to conceal himself from everyone out of fear for his life, al-Karājūkī states:

“Despite this, we cannot say with certainty that no one is able to recognize the Imam or reach

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Karājūkī, a *nisba* derived from the name of the town of Karājūk, see al-Zubaydī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, 13:632. For passing references to him, see Akhtar, *Early Shiʿite Imāmiyyah Thinkers*, 185, 208; Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History*, 198.

\(^{481}\) Al-Karājūkī’s *Kanz al-fawāʿid* is discussed briefly in Kadhim, “Politics and Theology of Imāmī Shiʿa in Baghdād in the 5th/11th Century,” 177.

him. In fact, it may be possible that a group of his friends meet him (qad yajūz an yajtamiʿ bihi ṭāʾifa min awliyāʾihi) while concealing their encounter and keeping it a secret (tastir ijtimaʿahā bihi wa-tukhfīhi).”483 Al-Karājukī continues that since the Imam is in ghayba, those seeking guidance (al-mustarshidūn) must find recourse in “the fuqahāʾ,” pose their questions to them about the Sharia and seek their legal rulings about what is permissible and impermissible since the fuqahāʾ are “the representatives (al-wasāʾiḥ) between the people and the Lord of the Age and the custodians of the laws of the Sharia of Islam.”484 He adds that even though the Imam is concealed and the people cannot recognize him (lā yaʿrifūn shakhṣahu), he is nonetheless among them, following their affairs and apprised of their words and deeds. Should, God forbid, the fuqahāʾ stray from the truth, God will cause the Imam to appear.485 In other words, as long as the Imam remains in ghayba, the believers can rest assured that the fuqahāʾ are not causing the people to go astray even if they are unable to determine his opinion on legal matters in a direct manner.

3.6.2. Al-Ḥalabī

483 Al-Karājukī, Kanz al-fawāʾid, 2:218.
484 Al-Karājukī, Kanz al-fawāʾid, 2:218.
Abū al-Ṣalāḥ al-Ḥalabī (374–447/984–1055) studied under al-Mufid, al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī in Baghdad and later served as al-Ṭūsī’s representative in his native Aleppo. A prominent Shi‘ī jurist and theologian, he is referred to as al-Murtaḍā’s successor in scholarship. In his Taqrīb al-ma‘ārif, al-Ḥalabī reiterates al-Murtaḍā’s opinion: “We cannot say with certainty that the Imam is concealed from all (of his friends). Rather, it is possible that he appears to many of them (yajūz zuhūruhu li-kathīr minhum). As for those he does not appear to, they still know that he is alive and remain committed to the obligation of obeying him for they fear him,” knowing that the Imam can appear to any observant believer. “In this manner,” al-Ḥalabī argues, “the Imam’s ghayba is like his appearance” (fa-ghaybantuhu ʿalā hādhā al-taqdīr kā-zuhūrihi).

3.6.3. Al-Ṭūsī

The most eminent of al-Murtaḍā’s students was one Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 459 or 460/1066-7), known as Shaykh al-Ṭāʾifa (the Master or Authority of the [Twelver] Shi‘ī

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487 Al-Ḥalabī, Taqrīb al-ma‘ārif, 444. On this work, see al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dhari‘a, 4:366 (no. 1096).
community) or simply al-Shaykh.\textsuperscript{488} Al-Ṭūsī was originally a student of al-Mufīd and upon the latter’s death, became one of the most prominent pupils of al-Murtaḍā who entrusted him with the task of condensing his aforementioned \textit{Kitāb al-shāfī fī al-imāma}. The influence al-Ṭūsī exerted on future generations of scholars can be appreciated by the fact that the school of law which he founded maintained its supremacy in Shiʿī legal scholarship for the next three centuries.

Invoking Muʿtazili principles, al-Ṭūsī argues that God can in no wise be blamed for the Imam’s \textit{ghayba} as God is incapable of being unjust or committing an ugly act (\textit{qabiḥan}). The Imam is also not responsible for he is simply abiding by the will of God. Rather, the \textit{ghayba} is due to (1) the overwhelming number of the Imam’s enemies and (2) the fewness of his helpers (\textit{kathrat al-ʿadū wa-qillat al-nāṣīr}). He then furnishes traditional proofs for the long life of the Qāʾim by mentioning that previous prophets have lived for as long as three thousand years.\textsuperscript{489}


\textsuperscript{489} Al-Ṭūsī, “Masāʾil kalāmiyya,” 99.
Like al-Murtaḍā, al-Ṭūsī is hesitant to permit the possibility of encountering the Imam during the second ghayba. He certainly never affirms this possibility as a matter of doctrine. In his Talkhīṣ al-shāfī,490 al-Ṭūsī asserts that the Shi’a are not obliged to believe that the Imam is hidden from all of his friends (lā yajib al-qāṭ‘ ʿalā istitārihi ‘an jamī‘ awliyā’ihī).491 Here, he presents his view by restating the position of al-Murtaḍā: “We cannot be certain that [the Imam] is hidden from all of his initiates/friends. It suffices to say that (seeing the Imam) is possible (wa-l-tajwīz fī hādhā al-bāb kāfī).”492 Yet he appears to contradict himself in the same work stating that the rationale for the Imam not appearing to his friends reverts to the believers and not to the Imam himself because if he appears to them, they may become so excited that they inform their friends. Before you know it, the news has reached the Imam’s enemies who will seek to find and harm him. For this reason, it is more likely that the Imam will remain concealed from everyone (fā-yaʿūd al-amr ilā al-istitār ‘an al-jamī‘).493


491 Al-Ṭūsī, Talkhīṣ al-shāfī, 4:222.

492 Al-Ṭūsī, Talkhīṣ al-shāfī, 4:217. The same statement is repeated in al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 93.

493 Al-Ṭūsī, Talkhīṣ al-shāfī, 1:94.
In his Kitāb al-ghayba, completed in 447/1055-6,\textsuperscript{494} al-Ṭūsī sought to reconcile the methods of the rationalists and the Traditionists by defending the doctrine of occultation through adducing hadiths as well as strictly rational arguments. He states that although the enemies of the Imam have prevented him from appearing and guiding the affairs of the world, they are not able to hold him back him from appearing to his elite friends, provided he has complete confidence in their obedience to him.\textsuperscript{495} He then speculates, “It is possible that (the Imam) appears to most of (his friends) but each person can only speak for his own self (lit., each person only knows of his own state)” (wa-lā ya’lam kull insān illā ḥāl nafsihi).\textsuperscript{496} If the Imam does not appear to someone, it is because the believer has likely been lax in carrying out his religious obligations.\textsuperscript{497} In other words, “Whoever the Imam does not appear to must look within himself and mend his ways (yanbaghī an yuraji‘ nafsahu wa-yuṣliḥ sīratahu) because if

\textsuperscript{494} On this work, see Muḥammadī, “al-Ghayba,” DMT, 12:146-7; Akhtar, Early Shi‘ite Imāmiyyah Thinkers, 231; Tihrānī, Zindigīnāmah-yi Shaykh Ṭūsī, 38; Rāymār, “Shaykh Ṭūsī: The Life and Works of a Shi‘ite [sic] Leader,” 136.

\textsuperscript{495} Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 98.

\textsuperscript{496} Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 99. Persian translation: Ṭūsī, Khūrshīd dar nahān (trans. Jalālī), 157-8; Dhākirī, “Irtibāṭ bā imām-i zamān,” 78. The same response is given in a different work: “While we cannot be certain that all of his friends do not see him [i.e., it is possible that some do see him], each person can only speak for what he himself knows or has seen.” Al-Ṭūsī, “Sharh jumal al-‘ilm wa-l-‘amal lil-Sharīf al-Murtada ‘Alam al-Hudā,” 244-5.

\textsuperscript{497} Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-ghayba, 99 > al-Nūrī, Jannat al-ma‘wā, 151.
God knows that his intention to help the Imam is pure and that he will not revert from that intention, the Imam will appear to him.\footnote{498}

Yet al-Ṭūsī, like all of the scholars before him, does not mention a single account of anyone who encountered or saw the Imam after the death of the last safīr.\footnote{499} We should view the guarded opinion proffered by al-Murtaḍā, al-Karājukī, al-Ḥalabī, and al-Ṭūsī in the context of the pressures they and other Shiʿī scholars of the time faced from their debaters, the Muʿtazilites and other dialecticians, to substantiate the prolonged absence of the Imam with strictly rational proofs. Their willingness to concede the possibility of encounters with the Imam was likely a strategic way to neutralize the doubts raised by their rationalist interlocutors rather than a doctrinal judgment. In this light, it merits noting that al-Ṭūsī does not make the slightest allusion to the issue of seeing the Imam in his statement of core Imāmī beliefs.\footnote{500}


\footnote{499} The third chapter of al-Ṭūsī’s \textit{Kitāb al-ghayba} is entitled, “reports of some of those who saw the lord of the [final] age while not recognizing him or recognizing him soon after the fact of having seen him.” This would have been the appropriate place to mention an account of a second occultation encounter with the Imam but none is found. All of the 15 reports mentioned by al-Ṭūsī in this chapter date from the Lesser Occultation.

\footnote{500} In the section of this work on the twelfth Imam, al-Ṭūsī argues that the Imam will continue to subsist until the end of the Muslim community “because he is a divine grace (lutf) to the people and God is obliged to act with kindness in every age. If the Imam was not living, then God would have failed in his duty to be kind.” He then adds, “The proof that the Qāʾim, [God’s] Caliph, is alive and present (hayy}
3.7. Conclusion

As we have demonstrated in this chapter, al-Nuʿmānī, al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufid are adamant that the door of privileged communication between believers and the Hidden Imam was closed *in perpetuum* (with the exception of the Imam appearing in a dream to al-Ṣadūq and to the servants who are with him at all times in the case of al-Mufid). Neither of these scholars ever suggests that seeing the Imam is a possibility for other Shiʿa, including the ulama. The most important text that reflects this position is the final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam, declaring anyone who claims to see him before the end of time a lying impostor.

The door that the *tawqīʿ* sought to close was partially opened by al-Mufid and to a greater extent by al-Murtaḍā and his students. The ghayba of the twelfth Imam had created the requisite intellectual space for Shiʿi scholars to formulate theology and jurisprudence. Guarded in their response to their rationalist interlocutors, these scholars moved the issue of contacting and seeing the Imam from the realm of the *non possumus* to the realm of the theoretically possible. Permitting the possibility of encounters with the Imam served both a discursive and an apologetic function. It also adumbrated what was to occur in the next two centuries: the

*mawjūd*) is that there must be an Imam who is protected [by God] from doing wrong (*maʿṣūm*) at every moment and in every age (*kull ān, wa-zamān*). And so, it is established that he is living and present in
appearance of the earliest stories of contact with the Imam since the death of the last representative, signifying a further move *a posse adesse.*
CHAPTER 4

From the Youth and the Stone to the Opening of the Floodgates

The tacit approval of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī for the possibility of seeing the Imam adumbrated if not fully paved the way for what happened next. In the following two centuries, accounts of encounters and contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, albeit rare and infrequent, begin to appear in the works of Shiʿī authorities, Quṭb al-Dīn Rāwandī (d. 573/1178), Aḥmad al-Ṭabarsī (d. late 6th/12th cent), and in particular Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266) and his student al-Irbīlī (d. 692/1292-3 or 693/1293-4), the latter of whom cites al-Murtaḍā’s opinion verbatim to justify his inclusion of two stories of contact with the Imam from his own time.

Until the late 12th century, other than al-Ṣadūq’s dream of the Hidden Imam at the Kaʿba which we discussed in chapter 3, we have only one other story of a post-Lesser Occultation encounter with the Imam, though this account cannot be dated with absolute certainty. The encounter described in this account again occurs in a dream and is found in the little known Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Āmulī al-Māzandarānī’s
(known as al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr; fl. early 5th/early 11th cent.) Dalāʾil al-imāma [The Proofs of the Imamate], a hagiographical collection of mostly miraculous tales seeking to prove the Imams’ supernatural abilities, similar in tone and substance to parts of al-Ṣaffār al-Qummi’s Baṣāʾir al-darajāt. The account in question is found as the last of five reports in a chapter called, “Knowledge about the companions [i.e., Shiʿa] who saw the Lord of the Age during the

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501 According to al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dhariʿa, 8:241, the author’s full name is Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Āmulī al-Māzandarānī. The epithet al-Ṣaghīr serves to distinguish him from an earlier Shiʿi scholar with the same name who lived in the first half of the 4th/10th cent., was a contemporary of al-Kulaynī, and the author of al-Mustarshad fī al-imāma (on this work, see chapter 1). Al-Ṭihrānī suggests that al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr was a contemporary of al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058-9) and al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) as he narrates Traditions on the authority of teachers of both of these scholars, but the publisher of the Qum edition of Dalāʾil al-imāma have argued that he belonged to an earlier generation of scholars (that included al-Murtaḍā and al-Raḍī) who were also contemporaries of al-Ṭūsī and al-Najāshī. See the publisher’s introduction, al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, Dalāʾil al-imāma, 29-37, esp. 31-2. See also al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, Nawādir al-muʿjizāt, 35-57 (from the publisher’s introduction). Unlike al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr’s Dalāʾil al-imāma, his Nawādir al-muʿjizāt does not appear in Ibn Ṭāwūs’s list of early Shiʿi books and is not mentioned in Kohlberg’s study of Ibn Ṭāwūs.

502 The copy of Dalāʾil al-imāma that has survived is incomplete. We do not know when Dalāʾil al-imāma was completed but we can infer from internal evidence a terminus post quem of 411/1020-1. See al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, Dalāʾil al-imāma, 40 (from the publisher’s introduction). Al-Ṭihrānī al-Dhariʿa, 8:244 (no. 1018), points out that Ibn Ṭawūs was the first Shiʿi scholar to cite from this work. On references to Dalāʾil al-imāma in Ibn Ṭawūs’s writings, see Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar, 140-1 and al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, Dalāʾil al-imāma, 42-4 (from the publisher’s introduction). It is surprising that this work has not been closely studied by scholars of early Shiʿi esotericism (for example, I could find only a minor reference to it in Amir-Moezzi’s Le Guide divin, 288 (note 637)). In fact, both Dalāʾil al-imāma and Nawādir al-muʿjizāt deserve detailed studies that are beyond the purview of this dissertation. One of the topoi encountered in this work is peregrinations to mysterious islands and lands controlled by the Imams. For references and discussion, see Sindawi, “The Sea in the Miracles of Shiʿite Imāms,” 458-9, 461, 464, 469; Ghaemmaghami, “To the Abode of the Hidden One: The Green Isle in Shiʿi, Early Shaykhī, and Bābī-Bahāʾī Topography.”
ghayba and recognized him.” The first four reports mentioned in this chapter are all dated to the Lesser Occultation. The fifth report appears to describe an event that occurred during the Greater Occultation though it is not possible to be certain. Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr writes that he heard this story from Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Hārūn b. Mūsā al-Tallaʿukbarī (fl. late 4th/10th cent.), who heard it from a certain Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Abī al-Baghl al-Kātib, about whom nothing is known, during the lifetime of Abū Manṣūr al-Ṣāliḥān, a minister at the court of the Buyid rulers, Sharaf al-Dawla (r. 350-79/961-89) and Bahāʾ al-Dawla (r. 379/989 to 403/1012) during the reign of the Abbasid caliph, al-Qādir bi-Allāh (r. 381/991 to 422/1031). In the account, al-Baghl al-Kātib, fleeing from Abū Manṣūr al-Ṣāliḥān, seeks

503 Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, Dalāʾil al-imāma, 537-53.

504 Little information is known about him though both he and his father are mentioned by al-Najāshī, Rijāl al-Najāshī, 79. He himself appears in lists of the students of al-Ṣādiq. See al-Ṣādiq, al-Hidāya (fī al-usūl wa-l-furūḥ), 97 (from the editor’s introduction). See also al-Khūʿi, Muʿjam rijāl al-ḥadīth wa-taṣil ṭabaqāt al-ruwā, 18:336 (no. 11971). Al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīʿa, 8:242 gives 387/997-8 as his date of death.

505 On him, see al-Bāḥrānī, Taḥṣīrat al-walī, 192 (note 3).

506 On him, see Madelung, “Sharaf al-Dawla,” EI².

507 On him, see Bosworth, “Bahāʾ al-Dawla wa-Ḍiyāʾ al-Milla,” EI².

508 Al-Gulpāyigānī, Muntakhab al-athar, 418 (note 1), reasons that the person who narrated the account from Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Abī al-Baghl al-Kātib was a contemporary of al-Muṣīd and that Abū Manṣūr al-Ṣāliḥān apparently lived in the early period of the Greater Occultation. As a result, Gulpāyigānī records
refuge in a cemetery in Baghdad and asks its custodian to lock the gate. During the night, a young man miraculously enters the cemetery without opening the gate and gives him a prayer known as *Duʿāʾ al-fāraj* [prayer for the removal of difficulties] to recite for divine aid and assistance (*al-ghawth*). The next day, al-Ṣāliḥān’s men find and assure him that he will not be harmed if he comes with them to meet al-Ṣāliḥān. The latter tells him that the previous night, the Hidden Imam appeared to him in a dream and commanded him “to do good.” Al-Baghl al-Kâtib tells him the Hidden Imam appeared to him as well as a young man and proceeds to tell him about the seeming miracle that transpired in the cemetery.510

the account in the chapter of his work on Greater Occultation encounters while granting the possibility that the events in the story occurred during the Lesser Occultation.

509 A prayer with this name is found in many modern Shiʿi devotional texts though in different forms and attributed to different Imams, e.g., Qummī, *Kulliyāt-i mañāī al-jinān*, 47-8; cf. idem, 115-6 (*Duʿāʾ-i fāraj-i ḥadrat-i ḥujja* [the *Duʿāʾ-i fāraj* of the Hidden Imam]), which is actually a different prayer than the previous. See also al-Shirāzī, *Kalimat al-Imām al-Mahdī*, 281-2. For general information on prayers attributed to various Imams, see Algar, “Doʿā,” *Elr*, 7:452-6; Amir-Moezzi, “Notes sur la Prière dans le Shi‘isme Imamite;” Turner, “Aspects of Devotional Life in Twelver Shi‘ism: The Practice of du’ā.”

510 Al-Ṭabarî al-Ṣaghîr, *Dalā’il al-imāma*, 551-3 (no. 525) > al-Majlisi, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:304-6 (cited in chapter 15: *mā ẓahara min muʿjizātihi wa-fihi baʿd aḥwālihi wa-aḥwāl sufārāʿihi*) > al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 1:360-1 (in the chapter on the Imam’s miracles). It is worth noting that neither al-Majlisi nor al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdī include the account in their chapters on encounters with the Imam in the Greater Occultation. On the other hand, Nūrī, *al-Najm-i thāqib* 2:567-9 (account no. 30), translated the story into Persian and included it in the chapter of his work dealing with accounts of contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation. The original account in Arabic is also recorded in Ibn Ĥāwûs, *Faraj al-mahmûm*, 245-7 (on this work, see below); al-Majlisi, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 88:349-51 (no. 11),
The next prominent Shīʿī authority after al-Ṭūsī was Amīn al-Dīn (or Amīn al-Islām) Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), author of “probably the most widely used and admired Twelver Imāmī  *tafsīr*.” Al-Ṭabrisī continued the work of al-Murtaḍā and his students in incorporating principles of Muʿtazilī  *kalām* to defend the doctrine of *ghayba*. And like the scholars before him, he does not mention any accounts of believers who have seen the Imam during the Greater Occultation. In fact, he does not address the issue of seeing the Imam during the *ghayba* at all in his *Tāj al-mawālid fī mawālid al-aʾimma wa-wafayāthihim*, while the seven accounts he cites in the chapter of his *Iʿlām al-warā bi-aʿlām al-hudā* on sightings of the Imam are all from the Lesser Occultation.

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513 Al-Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām al-warā*, 2:218-21. In *Tāj al-mawālid*, 13, al-Ṭabrisī states that no one knows when the *ghayba* will end and that anyone who appoints a time for the Imam’s appearance is a liar. In the same work, *idem*, 116-7, he weighs in on a question that would later become a source of great contention: does the Hidden Imam have children and if so, are their lives also prolonged? Al-Ṭabrisī
One of al-Ṭabrisī’s sons, Abū ‘Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī (fl. late 6th/12th cent.), however, in a collection of prayers and supplications called Kunūz al-najāḥ, mentions a prayer taught by the Hidden Imam in a dream to a certain Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Ahmad b. Abī al-Layth (about whom nothing is known) in the Quraysh cemetery at a time when Abū al-Ḥasan had fled to the cemetery out of fear of being killed.

avers that according to the hadith of the Imams, it is not prohibited (wa-ghayr mumtaniʿ) that he has children and a family and it is also permitted (jāʾiz) that he will have a family during the days of his rule (ayyām dawalitihi) after he (re)appears though he ultimately concludes that no one can answer this question with certainty. In some later stories of encounters with the Imam popular in the Safavid period, it is suggested that the Imam has children (and great-grandchildren) who rule various islands on the earth that the Imam himself frequents. See Ghaemmagheri, “To the Abode of the Hidden One.” Al-Ṭabrisī’s Ilām al-warā bi-aʿlām al-hudā (completed between 511/1117 and 534/1140) is a detailed biography of the Prophet, Fāṭima and the twelve Imam while the much shorter Tāj al-mawālid fi mawālid al-aʿimma wa-wafayāthim (completed in 509/1115-6), can be considered an abridgement of the latter (even though it was completed earlier).

514 This work has never been published and I do not know of any extant manuscripts in North America; however, Amir-Moezzi has consulted a manuscript of this work, identifying it as [s.l. [Iran], 1318/1900] in his “Contribution à la Typologie,” 128 (note 68). Al-Ṭhrānī, al-Dharrī, 18:175-6, states that this work was compiled by Amīn al-Dīn al-Ṭabrisī’s son, but adds that Ibn Tāwūs has said explicitly in his Muhaj al-daʿawāt wa-manhaj al-ʿibādāt (on this work and its author, see below) that the author is al-Ṭabrisī senior, the exegete. On Kunūz al-najāḥ, see also Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work, 233-4 (no. 320).

515 Amir-Moezzi found this prayer in the above-mentioned manuscript of the Kunūz al-najāḥ, 46-7 (see Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 128 (Récit de Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī l-Layth (VI/XII siècle)). The earliest work I found this account in is al-Mashhadi (d. 610/1213-4), al-Mazār al-kabīr, 591. Al-Mashhadi includes the account and the prayer it contains in the section of his work on supplications to recite as one is entering the sīrāb in Samarra. He does not mention the source, saying only that the prayer has been narrated on the authority of the Imam. The account is also mentioned in Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 2:554 (no. 24) (citing an unidentified ms. of Kunūz al-najāḥ at his disposal as his
The story of this prayer bears an uncanny resemblance to the story mentioned earlier from al-Ṭabarî al-Ṣaghîr’s *Dalā’il al-imāma* and may in fact be a copy though the prayer taught by the Imam in this account is different.

4.1. **The Mysterious Youth**

The earliest account of an encounter with the Imam in a wakeful state that we can definitively place in the Greater Occultation is the story of the youth and the Black Stone of the Ka’ba, recorded in the chapter on the miracles of the twelfth Imam in Quṭb al-Dīn Saʿīd b. Hibat Allāh al-Rāwandī’s (d. 573/1178) *al-Kharāʾīj wa-l-jarāʾīḥ*, also known as *Kitāb al-muʿjizāt*. This account is narrated on the authority of the Shi‘ī Traditionist and jurist, Abū al-
Qāsim Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Qūlawayh (d. 368/978-9 or 369/979-80), a disciple of al-Kulaynī and a teacher of al-Mufid.\textsuperscript{518} Al-Rāwandī does not mention the final tawqīʿ of the Hidden Imam in this work and makes no attempt to reconcile this account with the “lying impostors” sentence of the tawqīʿ.

A brief summary of the story follows: According to Ibn Qūlawayh, after the Black Stone of the Kaʿba was returned by the Ismāʿīlī Qārāmīṭa in 339/950-1,\textsuperscript{519} that is, some eight years after the passing of the last safīr and the start of the Greater Occultation, no one was capable of setting it back in its place. Suddenly, Ibn Qūlawayh witnessed a comely, brown-skinned youth\textsuperscript{520} appear and in a spectacular feat of derring-do, miraculously yet quietly set the

\textsuperscript{518} On him, see McDermott, “Ebn Qūlawayh, Abu’l-Qāsem Jaʿfar,” \textit{EIr}, 8:47.

\textsuperscript{519} Al-Majlisi, \textit{Bihār al-anwār}, 52:58 and other later authorities give the year as 337/948-9 but historical sources confirm that the Qārāmīṭa returned the Black Stone in 339/951 after having stolen it in 317/930. See, for example, Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232-3), \textit{al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh}, 8:486. The discrepancy between 337 and 339 is perhaps due to how close the words sabʿ and tisʿ appear when written. The unprecedented theft of the Stone by the forces of the Qarmaṭī leader Abū Ṭāhir sent shock waves throughout the Muslim world and was clearly meant as an apocalyptic act to usher the end of the era of the Sharia if not the end of the Islamic dispensation, a central Qarmaṭī objective. See Hajnal, “Some Aspects of the External Relations of the Qarāmīṭa in Bahrayn,” 235. For detailed study of the theft and return of the Black Stone, see Halm, \textit{The Empire of the Mahdi}, 250-64 and 380-5. See also Madelung, “The Fatimid and the Qarmaṭīs of Bahrayn,” 21, 37-9; Wensinck and J. Jomier, “Kaʿba,” \textit{EI}; Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period,” 272.

\textsuperscript{520} According to Shiʿī Traditions, the Qāʾim is miraculously kept by God in the form of a young man throughout his ghayba and he will appear “as a robust youth in the form/body of someone who is his in early thirties at the time of his zuhūr” (\textit{annahu yakūn ‘ind zuhūrihi shābbu ʿawīyyu fī šūrat ibn nayyif})
Black Stone in the *al-ruḵn al-aswarz* in a vivid typological refiguration of the famous account mentioned in the *s̱ira* of the Prophet setting the same Black Stone in its place as a youth in Mecca.\(^{521}\) Phantom-like, the mysterious lad disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared. Since Shiʿi lore maintains that only a Prophet or Imam can set the Black Stone in its place,\(^{522}\) the narrator concludes that he has just encountered the Hidden Imam.\(^{523}\)

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\(^{521}\) [Ibn Ishāq], *The Life of Muḥammad* (trans. Guillaume), 86; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 4:217 (no. 3). The account of course bears a noticeable resemblance to the episode of the Sword in the Stone featured in the epic poem *Merlin*.

\(^{522}\) According to Muḥammad al-Ṣadr, *Ṭārīkh al-ghayba al-kubrā*, 121, there are no known hadiths to support this notion though he adds that according to tradition, only prophets (e.g. Abraham, Muḥammad) or Imams (e.g. Zayn al-ʿĀbidin) have placed the Black Stone in its place.

Serious questions surround the provenance of this story. Of the twenty-five works attributed to Ibn Qūlawayh, only his Kāmil (or Kamāl) al-ziyārāt (or al-ziyāra), the earliest extant work on the rewards bestowed upon those who visit the tombs of the Prophet and the Occultation; Nūrī-Ṭabarsī, Kifāyat al-muwahhidin, 2:815-6; Majlisi, Mahdi-i maw’ūd (trans. Davāni), 796-8, where the translator mistakenly records the date of the account as 307/919-20. A partial English translation is found in Dewji, Imame Zaman Hazrat Mehdi (Lakha trans.), 133-4. Nūrī-Ṭabarsī, Kifāyat al-muwahhidin, 2:854, contends that the Qarāmi ṭā’s theft of the Black Stone and destruction of the Ka’ba fulfilled one of the portents of the Imam’s appearance. He likely has in mind a well-known hadith stating that the Qāʾim will destroy the Ka’ba when he appears. It merits observing that the Black Stone has a close association with the Qāʾim in an early Shiʿi hadith. According to a hadith attributed to al-Ṣadūq, the primordial covenant (see Qur’an 7:172) was entered into at the Black Stone. When the Qāʾim appears, Gabriel will descend to earth in the form of a bird, become the first creature to pledge allegiance to the Qāʾim at the Black Stone, serve as the Qāʾim’s proof and guide to the Qāʾim and witness those who pledge fealty to him, in a mythic reenactment of the primordial covenant. Al-Ṣadūq, ‘Ilal al-sharāʿi’, 2:429-30 > Ḥ. al-Ḥillī (d. after 802/1399-1400), Muktaṣar baṣāʿir al-darajāt, 490-1 (no. 585); al-Majlisi, Biḥār al-anwār, 52:279 (no. 2); al-Jazāʾirī, Riyāḍ al-abrār fī manāqib al-ʿāimmah al-ṭāhir, 3:177 (no. 225). See also al-Ṣadūq, ‘Ilal al-sharāʿi’, 2:423-4 (no. 5) > Ḥ. al-Ḥillī, Muktaṣar baṣāʿir al-darajāt, 488 (no. 583); al-Majlisi, Rawdat al-muttaqūn fī sharḥ man lā yahḍuruhu al-faqīh, 4:6; al-Ḥurr al-ʿAmili, Ṣafṣil wasāʾil al-Shiʿa ilā taḥṣīl masāʾil al-sharīʿa, 13:319 (no. 17840). (Cf. according to a hagiographical account first mentioned in al-Rāwandī’s al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾih, green angels descended to earth on the night of the twelfth Imam’s birth and instructed Ḥasan al-ʿAskari to protect the infant. Al-ʿAskari identified one of the birds as Gabriel. See al-Rāwandī, al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾih, 1:456 > al-Bahrānī, Madinat al-maʿājīz, 8:33; al-Amin, A’yān al-Shiʿa, 2:67). A different hadith states that Gabriel will appear at the time of the Imam’s zuhūr in the form of a giant white bird, an image that perhaps is meant to remind us of the giant cosmic cock/white rooster who serves as the Prophet’s friend and stands before the Throne of God in many Traditions, see Tottoli, “At Cock-Crow: Some Muslim Traditions about the Rooster”; Omidsalar, “Cock. ii. In Persian Literature and Folklore,” Elr, 5:878-82. He will place one foot on the Ka’ba and the other on the city of Jerusalem, i.e., the holiest sites of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and cry out the beginning of the first verse of Sūrat al-Nahl: “The amr of God has come so seek not [any longer] to hasten it!” al-Ṣadūq, Kamāl al-dīn, 608 (no. 18); al-Ahsāʾī, Kitāb al-raʿāʾa, 94. As we mentioned in chapter 1, the amr of God is often defined in Shiʿi sources as the Qāʾim and/or his amr or qiyām.
Imams has survived. However, the story of the youth and the Black Stone is not mentioned in this work. Even more importantly, some two centuries separate Ibn Qūlawayh and al-Rāwandī, yet no scholar prior to al-Rāwandī (including any of Ibn Qūlawayh’s students such as al-Mufid) makes the slightest allusion to this account. Since al-Rāwandī has not provided a formal isnād (saying only that he is narrating the account on the authority of Ibn Qūlawayh), we have no way of learning his source.

In the same period, a contemporary of al-Rāwandī, Abū Maṣūr Aḥmad al-Ṭabarsī (d. late 6th/12th cent.; not to be mistaken with his more famous contemporary, the aforementioned Qur’an exegete, Amin al-Dīn al-Ṭabrisi) claimed that some two centuries earlier, al-Mufid

524 McDermott, “Ebn Qūlawayh, Abu’l-Qāsem Ja'far,” Elr, 8:47. On Kāmil al-ziyārāt, see al-Ṭibrānī, al-Dharī‘a, 17:255 (no. 139); Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work, 211 (no. 253); Nakash, “The Visitation of the Shrines of the Imams and the Shi‘i Mujtahids in the Early Twentieth Century,” 155

525 On him, see Kohlberg, “al-Ṭabarsī (al-Ṭabrisi),” El², 10:39; Husayn Karīmān, “Ṭabarsī, Abū Maṣūr Ahmad b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib,” DMT, 10:472-3. As observed in these articles, virtually nothing is known about the life of this scholar and thus Kohlberg’s ambiguity about the correct transliteration of his nisba. If he was born in the village of Tabris (the Arabicized form of Tafresh) between Kāshān and ʿĪsfahān, then his nisba is al-Ṭabrisi. If however he was born in the north Iranian region of ʿĪsfahān (Tapuria), his nisba would be al-Ṭabarsī. On this problem, see the first paragraph of Kohlberg, “al-Ṭabrisī (Ṭabarisi), Amin al-Dīn,” El², 10:40. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 113 (note 8): whose statement, “Lecture conventionnelle: « Ṭabarsī » ; mais il s’agit en fait de la forme arabisée du nom de la ville iranienne de Tafresh, non loin de Qumm, la lecture correcte est donc « Ṭabrisi »,” needs to be corrected. Since he is buried in a shrine near Bārfūrūsh in ʿĪsfahān, it would be safe to presume that the correct vocalization of his name is in fact al-Ṭabarsī. Halm, Shi‘ism, 60, gives his date of death as 599/1202 though he does not provide a source.
had been in contact with the Hidden Imam by furnishing two short letters from the Imam addressed to al-Mufid with no chain of transmission in his anti-Sunni polemical work *al-Iḥtijāj ʿalā ahl al-lajāj*. In an attempt to prove both the Hidden Imam’s existence to the opponents of the Shiʿa as well as the fact that he directly communicates with some of the Shiʿī ulama, al-Ṭabarsī alleged that al-Mufid received these letters from the “Sacred Precinct” (*al-nāhiyya al-muqaddasa*) of the Hidden Imam in the year 410/1019, drawing obvious parallels to the *tawqīʿāt* furnished by the representatives and agents during the Lesser Occultation. However, al-Ṭabarsī neither identifies his sources nor provides an *isnād* for this or any of the other reports or hadiths he has cited (with the exception of the *tafsīr* ascribed to Hasan al-ʿAskarī discussed in chapter 1), maintaining in his introduction that he sees no need to cite *asānīd*

526 On this work, see Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 187-8 (no. 187). As pointed out by Kohlberg elsewhere, this work was very popular in the Safavid period, when it was twice translated into Persian, likely due to its anti-Sunni and polemical tone, Kohlberg, “al-Ṭabarsī (al-Ṭabrisī),” *EI²*, 10:39.

527 Al-Ṭabarsī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, 2:495-9. The two letters are repeated and translated into Persian by Nūrī in the chapter of his *Najm-i thāqib* on contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation. Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:660-5 (account no. 50), 2:666-72 (account no. 51). The letters are also cited in al-Shirāzī, *Kalimat al-Imām al-Mahdi*, 136-50. Nūrī mentions a report cited by Yūsuf al-Bahrānī saying that al-Mufid received three letters, one of which has not survived. Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:670. The three letters theory has gained popularity and is alluded to in many biographical entries about al-Mufid. See, for example, al-Mufid, *Awāʿil al-maqālāt, pānzdah* (of the editorial introduction). Madelung, “Mufid, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muhammad,“ *EI²*, was the first western scholar to take notice of the two letters, though he does not point out that they are not cited in any works prior to al-Ṭabarsī and are almost certainly of later origin.
because there is consensus \((al-ijmāʿ)\) and agreement about their authenticity.\(^{528}\) In one of these letters, al-Mufid is addressed with the honorific epithet, al-Shaykh al-Mufid. It was likely based on this letter that a student of al-Rāwandī, al-Ṭabrisī and al-Ṭabarsī, Zayn al-Din Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192), called “the most illustrious Imami scholar of the 12th century,”\(^{529}\) claimed in his \(Maʿālim al-ʿulamāʾ\), a bibliobigraphical lexicon of prominent Shiʿī scholars (combining features of both \( rijāl\) and \(fihrī\)st works), that the epithet al-Mufid was given to him by the Hidden Imam (\(wa-laqqabahu bi-l-shaykh al-Mufid šāhib al-zamān\)),\(^{530}\) a

\(^{528}\) Al-Ṭabarsī, \(al-Iḥtijāj\), 1:14.

\(^{529}\) Amir-Moezzi, “Ebn Šahrāšūb,” \(Elr\), 8:53-4; Modarressi, \(An Introduction to Shiʿī Law\), 45. Ibn Shahrāshūb’s most well-known work, \(Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib\), originally had a chapter on the twelfth Imam which may have included some accounts of encounters with the Imam but has not survived. See Kohlbreg, \(A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work\), 251 and Amir-Moezzi, “Ebn Šahrāšūb,” \(Elr\), 8:53-4, who notes that the section on the twelfth Imam is missing from every accessible surviving copy of this text, including a manuscript dated 777/1375-6. It is however unlikely that this work contained any accounts of meetings with the Imam from the Greater Occultation (other than perhaps the story of the youth and the Black Stone which was likely transmitted to Ibn Shahrāshūb by al-Rāwandī) since none of Ibn Shahrāshūb’s students (who presumably had access to his complete work) transmit any such accounts on his authority. A third work of Ibn Shahrāshūb which may contained encounter stories, the \(Mathālib al-nawāṣib\), likewise an anti-Sunnī polemic, has never been published though two manuscripts in private collections are pointed out by al-Ṭihrānī, \(al-Dharīʿa\), 19:76 (no. 409) and one manuscript at the Nāṣiriyyah Library in Lucknow by Amir-Moezzi, “Ebn Šahrāšūb,” \(Elr\), 8:53-4.

\(^{530}\) Ibn Shahrāshūb, \(Maʿālim al-ʿulamāʾ\), 148, where he adds that he has provided more information about how al-Mufid received this epithet from the Hidden Imam in his \(Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib\) (on this work, see the previous note). Repeated in (Āl Āqā) (d. 1269/1852-3), \(Tanbih al-ghāfilīn\), 91. Sources from the Safavid and Qajar periods claim that a poem eulogizing al-Mufid was left on his grave by the Hidden Imam. See Shūshtarī, \(Majālis al-muʾminīn\), 477. Nūrī mentions this report as an example of an encounter with the Hidden Imam, al-Nūrī, \(Jannat al-maʿwā\), 73 (account no. 25); Nūrī, \(Najm-i thāqib\),
point that has been challenged by prominent twentieth century grand ayatollah Abū al-Qāsim al-Khūʿī (d. 1412/1992).531

Moreover, none of the works written by al-Mufīd, his prolific students (e.g. al-Murtaḍā, al-Ṭūsī, al-Najāshi, al-Karājukī, Abū Ya'lā al-Ja'fari) or anyone else prior to al-Ṭabarṣī makes the slightest reference to these letters. Future generations of scholars cited from these letters without questioning them and one scholar from the late nineteenth century went so far as to claim that all of the ulama have accepted them.532 However, a number of modern scholars have cast doubts on their veracity. Baḥr al-'Ullum al-Ṭabarṣī (d. 1212/1797), about whom numerous stories of encounters with the Imam circulate (see the beginning of the introduction of this dissertation and below), states ironically that these letters amount to “a claim that the Imam can be seen – something which has been summarily rejected during the Greater


531 Al-Khūʿī, Muʿjam rijāl al-ḥadīth wa-taḥṣil ṭabaqāt al-ruwā, 18:220, where he pointed out that al-Mufīd was called al-Mufīd by his contemporaries al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the Arab linguist ʿAlī b. ʾĪsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994) well before the letters said to have been received from the Hidden Imam.

532 See Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 2:671. Among the scholars who have accepted them are Wahīd Bihbihānī (d. 1205/1791) (cited in Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 2:671) and Bihbihānī’s grandson, Maḥmūd b. ʿĀqā Muhammad ʿAlī (d. 1269/1852-3), who refers to the letters in praising al-Mufīd but states mistakenly that the letters were sent by the Imam during the Lesser Occultation. (Āl ʿĀqā), Tanbīḥ al-ghāfīlīn, 89. The letters continue to be cited by contemporary Shiʿī scholars and in books about the Hidden Imam. See for example, al-Qurashī, Ḥayāt al-Imām al-Mahdī, 75-81, 134.
Occultation” (daʿwāhu al-mushāhada al-manfiyya baʿd al-ghayba al-kubrā). The same assessment is echoed more recently by al-Khūʾī: “It is not possible to be certain about the authenticity of these tawqīʿāt that are said to have been sent from the Sacred Precincts [of the Hidden Imam] because al-Mufīd was born seven or nine years after the Greater Occultation and we do not know how they reached al-Mufīd.” Al-Khūʾī’s point about the year of al-Mufīd’s birth is an implicit reference to the “lying impostors” passage of the final tawqīʿ of the Hidden Imam to the fourth safīr. That is to say, according to al-Khūʾī, since al-Mufīd was born and lived after the end of the Lesser Occultation, he could not have been in contact with the Imam since the tawqīʿ prohibits such contact.

Other than the story of the youth and the Black Stone and the letters sent to al-Mufīd, stories of contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation remained very infrequent at this time. It merits noting that all other Twelver Shiʿī scholars who lived in the more than a century that separates al-Ṭūsī and al-Rāwandī and Ibn Shahrāshūb and who wrote works which include sections or chapters on the Hidden Imam and which have survived and been published do not broach the topic of encountering him during the Greater Occultation. These include the


following works which were consulted for this study: Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s (fl. late 5th/11th cent.) ‘Uyūn al-muʿjizāt35; Mutāqil b. ‘Aṭiyya’s (d. 505/1111-2) Muḥāwala ḥawl al-imāma wa-l-khilāfā (also called Muʾtamar ‘ulamā’ Baghdād fī al-imāma wa-l-khilāfā)536; Muḥammad b. al-Fattāl al-Nisābūrī’s (d. 508/1114-5)’ Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn wa-baṣīrat al-muttaʿiẓīn537; and Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī’s (d. 585/1189-90 or 588/1192-3) al-Thāqib fī al-manāqib.538 All of these works adduce accounts of the twelfth Imam’s birth, reports of those who saw him during the Lesser Occultation, and tawqīʿāt issued by the Imam to the sufārā’ as “proofs” (dalāʾil) of his existence. However, we do not find any stories of sightings or contact with the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation in these works. It would be safe to presume that if such stories existed or were in circulation at this time, we would expect to find them cited in these apologetic works.

4.2. The Miracle Worker


37 Al-Nisābūrī, Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn. On this work, see al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dhariʿa, 11:305 (no. 1815).

The person who deserves more credit than any other scholar for popularizing the theme of encounters with the Imam is the eminent and adroit Iraqi Shi‘i scholar, ʿAlī Raḍī al-Dīn, known as Ibn Ṭawūs (d. 664/1266). Hagiographical sources often point to Ibn Ṭawūs’s propensity for asceticism, for having been given the greatest name of God (ism Allāh al-ʿazīm), and for being in contact with the Hidden Imam. In fact, he is known to posterity as ṣāḥīb al-karāmāt (the miracle worker) for his exceptional spiritual prowess. In this section, we will consider every statement found in his writings about the issue of contacting the Hidden Imam.

In one of his earliest surviving works, al-Ṭarāʾif fī maʿrifat madhāhib al-ṭawāʾif, a polemical anti-Sunni work which appeared under a pseudonym (suggesting that Ibn Ṭawūs was practicing taqiyya) and likely written circa 633/1236, Ibn Ṭawūs furnishes the same arguments to prove the existence of the Hidden Imam and justify the Imam’s ghayba as found in earlier apologias such as al-Ṣadūq’s Kamāl al-dīn. His main argument is based on the notion of fear, viz. the Imam was forced to enter ghayba under threat of being killed. Ibn Ṭawūs refers


541 See Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work, 14; Javādī (ed.), “Ibn Ṭawūs, Sayyid Raḍī al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Mūsā,” DMT, 1:345: “it has been mentioned that (Ibn Ṭawūs) met the Hidden Imam.”

542 On this work, see Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work, 57-9 (no. 51).
to the final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam to the last *safīr* but intentionally - and brazenly - distorts
the text by omitting the sentence declaring anyone who claims to see the Imam a lying impostor: “When the matter [of the *sifāra*] reached ṬAbī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī, he said that the Mahdī informed him that he would [soon] pass away, revealed the day of his death to him, and instructed him not to appoint anyone else [as a *safīr*] because the complete *ghayba* had come when the believers would be tested, for such is God’s method carried into effect of old.”543 Upon omitting the “lying impostor” sentence, Ibn Ṭāwūs maintains: “After (al-Samuri’s death), many Shiʿa and non-Shiʿa met the Mahdī” (*wa-la-qad laqiya al-mahdī khalq kathir baʿda dhālika min shiʿatihi wa-ghayrihim*)544 and he furnished proofs (*al-dalāʾil*) to establish his identity to these people.” Who were these “many Shiʿa and non-Shiʿa” who encountered the Imam after the death of the fourth *safīr*? We are left to wonder since Ibn Ṭāwūs does not cite a single account in this work. He then asserts that that “even if (the Imam) is not visible today to all of his Shiʿa, it is not impossible for a group of them to encounter him, benefit from his words and deeds and conceal (this fact from others).”545


Elsewhere, in his *Muhaj al-da’awāt wa-manhaj al-‘ibādāt*, Ibn Ṭāwūs claims that he himself heard the voice of the Hidden Imam. He reports that on 13 Dhū al-Qa’dā 638/2 June 1241, while praying in the underground cellar (*al-sirdāb*) in Samarra,\(^{546}\) he heard the Imam recite a short prayer sotto voce.\(^{547}\) It is worth noting that he explicitly avoids mentioning that he

\(^{546}\) *Al-sirdāb* is the subterranean water well in Samarra into which, according to some reports, the Hidden Imam initially hid at the start of the *ghayba*. See Donaldson, *The Shi’ite Religion*, 233; Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʻi Islam*, 161-2. By the late 5th/11th century, it was already a place of pilgrimage for the Shi’a. See Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period,” 271. The well-known Moroccan explorer Ibn Baṭūta (d. 779/1368-9) recounts in his travelogue that he observed Shi’a in Samarra waiting for the Mahdī to emerge from a well (almost certainly a reference to the *sirdāb*). They likewise kept a horse tied nearby ready for him to use as soon as he appeared. See Shamisā, *Farhang-i talmihāt*, 566; cf. Ourghi, *Schiitischer Messianismus*, 257-8; Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 13; García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform* (trans. Beagles), 341; Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, 302. A shrine with a turquoise dome has been built over the *sirdāb* and is adjacent to the shrines of Imams al-Naqī (d. 254/868) and al-ʿAskarī. All three shrines are important sites of pilgrimage for the Shi’a and constitute part of the “sublime thresholds” (*al-ʿatabāt al-ʿāliyāt*) [=the Shi’ī shrine cities of Najaf, Karbalā, Kāẓimayn and Samarra], though surprisingly, the *sirdāb* is not mentioned in Algar, “ʿAtabāt,” *EIr*, 2:902-4. In anti-Shi’ī polemical works written by Sunnī scholars, the Shi’ī belief that the twelfth Imam is concealed in the *sirdāb* is often a subject of ridicule (see the comments by al-Irbīli below).

saw the Imam here, saying only that he heard the Imam’s voice. Is the final tawqīʿ of the Imam in the front of his mind here? After all, the tawqīʿ declares anyone who claims to have seen the Imam a liar and not anyone who has only heard his voice.

Elsewhere, in his Kashf al-mahajja li-thamarat al-muhja, completed in 649/1251-2 and dedicated to his sons Muḥammad and ʿAlī, Ibn Ṭawūs recalls being approached one day by a fellow believer (whose identity is not revealed) overcome with doubt (shubha) about the ghayba. This believer had read the various defenses of the Imam’s occultation but remained unconvinced. He lamented to Ibn Ṭawūs: “Why doesn’t [the Imam] just meet one of his Shiʿa and resolve the conflicts and differences that have arisen among them with respect to religious doctrines and laws?” Rather than answer the question directly, Ibn Ṭawūs says that God is more powerful than the Imam in dispelling the source of contention among Muslims and yet has chosen not to intervene for a wisdom that is known to Him alone. The same explanation can be applied to why the Imam does not appear to quell their differences. In other words, if

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548 On Kashf al-mahajja li-thamarat al-muhja, see Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work, 41-2 (no. 24). In the Safavid period, the celebrated scholar al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī abridged and commented on this work in a book called Tashīl al-sabil bi-l-hujja fī intikhāb kashf al-mahajja li-thamarat al-muhja.

the Imam wanted, he could appear to some or all of his followers but he chooses not to. One would guess from this answer that Ibn Ṭāwūs is averse to the notion of seeing the Imam. However, on the next page, in entrusting his son Muḥammad to the Hidden Imam and instructing him to always place the Imam’s needs before his own, Ibn Ṭāwūs mentions that he himself dreamt of the Imam in several places (or shrines) (*raʿaynāhu fī ʿiddat maqāmāt fī manāmāt*). In these dreams, the Imam answered his prayers and confirmed and blessed his family.  

His statement later in the same work that, “The path to your Imam is open (*al-tariq maftūha ilā imāmika*) to whoever God wishes to shower His loving kindness upon or treat favorably,” should likely be understood in this context: receiving guidance and confirmation from the Imam in dreams.

In two other works, Ibn Ṭāwūs speaks of sightings of the Imam in a wakeful state but in each case, the person who has seen the Imam is not named. In his *Faraj al-mahmūm fī maʿrifāt*

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Ibn Ṭāwūs speaks of an anonymous contemporary who saw the Hidden Imam while awake inside the Shrine of the seventh Imam in Iraq:

In my own time, I have met people who told me that they have seen the Mahdī. Some of them carried brief messages and letters from him (fa-fi him man hamalū ‘anhu riqāʾ an wa-rasāʾil) in reply to requests that were made to him. One of these individuals is a person whose words I know to be true yet would not allow me to disclose his name. He told me that he had asked God to grant him the favor of seeing the Mahdī (qad sa’ala Allāh ta’ālā an yatafaḍḍ al-‘alayhi bi-mushāhadat al-mahdī). He then dreamt that he would see him at a time that he specified (fa-ra’ā fī manāmihi annahu shāhiduhu fī waqtin ashāra ilayhi). He told me that when the time that had been specified arrived, he was visiting the shrine of Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim. He heard a voice which he had heard before when visiting the shrine of Imam al-Jawād.553 He refrained from troubling the man [whose voice he had heard], entered the shrine and stood at the feet of our master, Imam al-Kāẓim. He came out of the shrine and saw the person whom he believed to be the Mahdī with a companion (rafīq) by his side. He saw him but out of respect, refrained from saying a word (wa-shāhadahu wa-lam yukhāṭibu fī shay’ li-wujūb al-ta’dib bayna yadayhi).554


553 The shrines of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and his grandson, Muhammad al-Taqi al-Jawād (d. 218/834), the seventh and ninth Imams respectively, are adjacent to one another and lie in the town of Kāẓimayn (originally called al-Mashhad al-Kāzimī) three miles west of Baghdad. See Streck and Dixon, “Kāẓimayn,” EI², 4:854-6. Incidentally, Streck and Dixon mention that the earliest evidence of pilgrimage to these shrines dates from the 7th/13th century, citing as their source the Arab biographer Ibn Khallikān’s (d. 681/1282) Wafayāt [al-a’yān wa-anbā’ al-zamān], completed in 672/1274 (see Fück, “Ibn Khallikān,” EI², 3:833). The above account by Ibn Ṭawūs slightly precedes Ibn Khallikān.

554 A manuscript of this work is reproduced in an appendix to Matar’s unpublished dissertation, “The Faraj al-Mahmūm of Ibn Ṭawūs.” This passage is found in fol. no. 175. The passage is repeated in al-
Elsewhere in his *al-Muwāsa’a wa-l-muḍāyaqa* (also known as *Risāla fī al-muḍāyaqa fī fawāt al-ṣalā*), completed on 18 Rabī‘ 661/1 March 1263, Ibn Ṭawūs states: “I heard from someone whose name I will not mention that he contacted our master [the Hidden Imam] (*wa-sami‘tu mimman lā usammīhi muwāṣila baynahu wa-bayna mawlānā*), but if I were to describe this matter in detail, it would fill the pages of several books, proving from beginning to end that (our master) exists, is alive and is performing miracles.”

Until Ibn Ṭawūs, scholars had spoken of the possibility of seeing the Imam during the Greater Occultation. With Ibn Ṭawūs, encountering the Imam leaves the realm of possibility and enters the realm of actuality. However, we should note that although Ibn Ṭawūs himself

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Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 129, saw this account in the margins of a 1321/1904 ms. of al-Astarābādī’s *al-Fawā‘id al-madaniyya*. The ms. of al-Astarābādī’s *al-Fawā‘id al-madaniyya* which Amir-Moezzi consulted was not accessible to me but *al-Fawā‘id al-madaniyya* has since been published (in 1424/2003) and was consulted by me. Amir-Moezzi added that the encounter took place “un état de contemplation profonde” and that the Hidden Imam “celui-ci lui révéla de hautes connaissances secrètes qui le plongèrent dan un état extatique.” Neither of these sentences is found in the published edition of *al-Fawā‘id al-madaniyya* or in Nūrī’s Persian translation of the account completed in 1302/1885.
claimed to have seen the Imam in dreams (like al-Ṣadūq), he is careful to never explicitly say that he has seen the Imam while awake or in person. Here, comments by both contemporary academics\textsuperscript{557} and Shiʿī ulama\textsuperscript{558} need to be modulated. In fact, the earliest work in which we find a story of Ibn Ṭāwūs having encountered the Hidden Imam in a wakeful state is found more than a century after his death.\textsuperscript{559} It is likely that in the trustworthy believer in both of the above accounts whose name Ibn Ṭāwūs does not reveal is none other than himself and was understood as such by his interlocutors. Perhaps for political reasons or perhaps in an attempt remain faithful to the final tawqīʿ of the Imam, Ibn Ṭāwūs chose to relate and obfuscate the encounter in the third-person.

At a time of great turmoil, in face of the cataclysm that was the Mongol invasion and the imminent fall of the Abbasid empire, Ibn Ṭāwūs believed like many of his contemporaries

\textsuperscript{557} E.g., Momen, \textit{An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam}, 94, who states (sans source) that Ibn Ṭāwūs “claimed to have met the Hidden Imam” without qualifying that this encounter took place in a dream. Cf. Matar, “The Faraj al-Mahmūm of Ibn Ṭāwūs,” 28, who says that Ibn Ṭāwūs saw the Imam in a dream during a journey to the shrine of ʿAlī in Najaf in 641/1263, but strangely references Momen, \textit{An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam}, 94, who again does not mention that the encounter took place in a dream (nor does he add that it occurred during a journey to the shrine of ʿAlī).

\textsuperscript{558} E.g., al-Mūsawī, \textit{al-Liqāʾ al-mahdawī}, 141, who states that no other scholar has met the Hidden Imam as often as Ibn Ṭāwūs.

\textsuperscript{559} See al-Nīlī, \textit{al-Sūltān al-mufarrīj}, 57-61 (no. 10) (on this work, see below). This account was subsequently cited by al-Majlisī, \textit{Bihār al-anwār}, 52:75-7, and other scholars after him.
that the end times were at hand. Interpreting a hadith attributed to al-Ṣādiq to mean that after the Abbasid empire falls, a just and honest person from the descendants of the *ahl al-bayt* would lead the Muslim community and herald the coming of the Qāʾim, one night (12 Rabī’ 662/13 January 1264), “the thought occurred to (him) and (he) immediately knew” (*ghalaba ẓannī wa-ʿaraftu*) that the one whose appearance al-Ṣādiq had heralded was none other than he on account of his being descended from both Imams Ḥasan and Ḥusayn and the fact that the Mongol ruler had appointed him the chief (*naqīb*) of the ʿAlids, the titular head of the Shīʿa of Baghdad.\(^{560}\) It is thus of no minor significance to find that Ibn Ṭāwūs believed that he had attained the days of the Imam’s complete appearance (*udrik ayyām zuhūrihi al-kāmil*). He writes that “these, God willing, are the days of the appearance of those suns [i.e., the *rajʿa* of the Prophet and the Imams], a time when all pain and suffering will end” (*fa-hādā awān zuhūr tilka al-shumūs wa-zawāl al-ḍurr wa-l-buʾs*).\(^{561}\)

Ibn Ṭāwūs’s influence on future scholars who have written about the issue of encounters with the Imam is evident, beginning with his student, the prominent Iraqi Traditionist, jurist


and poet Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿAli b. ʿĪsā b. Abī al-Faṭḥ al-Irbilī (d. 692/1292-3 or 693/1293-4). Al-Irbilī’s most famous work, *Kashf al-ghumma fi maʿrifat al-aʾimma* (completed in 682/1283-4), is a massive two volume biography of the Prophet and the twelve Imams. The final chapter of this work, dedicated to the twelfth Imam, includes several accounts of sightings of and contact with the Hidden Imam from the Lesser Occultation. Here, al-Irbilī takes great exception to Sunnis who claim that the Shiʿa believe the Imam is hiding in an underground chamber (*sirdāb*) in Samarra. He maintains that the Shiʿa have never claimed that the Imam is permanently in the *sirdāb* but rather believe that “he comes and goes and travels around the earth, [entering peoples’] homes and tents, accompanied by [his] servants (*khadam*), entourage

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562 On the author, see Qurbānī-Zarrīn, “Bahāʾ al-Dīn Irbilī,” *DJI* (online edition); Javādi (ed.), “Irbilī,” *DMT*, 2:54-5. Algar, “Imam Musa al-Kazim and Sufi Tradition,” 5, mistakenly identifies the author as a Sunnī, perhaps because al-Irbilī transmitted hadiths from Sunnī sources in his *Kashf al-ghumma*, including most prominently from the Syrian Shāfī jurist Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-Ganjī al-Shāfī (d. 658/1260), a Sunnī scholar who sympathized strongly with ʿAlī, as demonstrated in his *Kifāyat al-tālib fī manāqib ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib*, and who supported the Shiʿī belief that the Hidden Imam was the Mahdī, as can be seen in his oft-published and oft-cited (in Shiʿī apologetic literature) *Kitāb al-bayān fī akhbār sāḥib al-zamān* in which he cited Sunnī Traditions to prove the Mahdīship of the twelfth Imam [on these works, see Madelung, “al-Mahdī,” *EI²*, 5:1236; Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 218 (no. 268)].

563 See al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dhāriʿa*, 18:47-8 (no. 619), who gives the title as *Kashf al-ghumma ʿan maʿrifat ahwāl al-aʾimma wa-ahl bayt al-ʾisma*. A popular work, *Kashf al-ghumma* was translated into Persian in the Safavid period and both the original and the translation have been published numerous times in recent years.
In addition, and more significantly for our purposes, al-Irbili records two stories of encounters with the Imam that have occurred near his own time (qiṣṣatayn qaruba ʿahdumā min zamānī) which he heard from “a group of trustworthy brethren” (jamāʿa min thiqāt ikhwānī): 1) the story of a certain Ismāʿīl b. al-Ḥasan al-Hirqilī from al-Ḥilla which appears to have been transmitted to him by Ibn Ṭāwūs who features prominently in the story; and 2) the account of the father of a certain al-Bāqī b. ʿAtwa al-ʿAlawi al-Ḥusaynī who al-Irbili appears to have heard directly from al-Bāqī before confirming its veracity with others. In both accounts, a mysterious stranger heals a thought-to-be incurable disease, disappears and is believed to have been the Hidden Imam. After recounting these two stories, al-Irbili adds that he knows of many accounts of Shīʿa who lost their way en route to Mecca, were saved from sure death by the Hidden Imam and returned to their home or

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564 Al-Irbili, Kashf al-ghumma fī maʿrifat al-aʾimma, 2:991.


caravan. He then says that he does not wish to drag out the issue; otherwise, he would mention some of these accounts. Instead, the two accounts that have occurred close to his own time are sufficient, suggesting that the stories of believers having been saved en route to Mecca are from the Lesser Occultation. The third and only other Greater occultation account that al-Irbili cites is the aforementioned story of the youth and the Black Stone.

In contrast to his teacher Ibn Ṭāwūs who as we saw distorted the final tawqīʿ of the Imam, al-Irbili attempts to reconcile the final tawqīʿ with the view expressed by authorities such as al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭabrisī that we cannot be certain about whether it is possible to see the Imam during the Greater Occultation: “As I see it, if someone does see the Imam, he knows not to claim to have seen him or encountered him publicly for anyone who claims to have seen him is a liar. In this way, there is no contradiction [between the final tawqīʿ and the stories of those who have seen the Imam during the Greater Occultation] but God knows best.” (wa-lladhī arāhu annahu in kāna yarāhu aḥad wa-qad ʿulima minhum annahum lā yaddaʿūna ruʾyatahu wa-mushāhadatahu wa-inna alladhī yaddaʾīhā kadhdḥāb wa-lā munāqada idhr wa-


568 Al-Irbili, Kashf al-ghumma fī maʿrifat al-aʾimma, 2:999-1000. He transmits the account from al-Rāwandī.
In other words, if someone sees the Imam and does not tell anyone that he has seen him, it is perfectly acceptable. This position was advanced in a more subtle manner in the works of al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī as we saw in chapter 3. Al-Irbilī in fact cites verbatim the position of al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī that each person can only know about his own to justify his inclusion of encounter narratives from the Greater Occultation. He, however, makes no attempt to resolve the tension between the solution that he has advanced and the two stories he just mentioned of individuals who were healed by the Imam and who obviously told others about it.

A contemporary of both Ibn Ṭāwūs and al-Irbilī, Kamāl al-Dīn Maytham al-Baḥrānī (d. after 681/1280), an associate of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), teacher of ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (on whom, see below) and author of an important commentary on the *Nahj al-balāgha*, who

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571 On him, see Mavani, “Doctrine of Imamate in Twelver Shiʿism,” 221-45 (Ch. 6: Kamāl al-Dīn Maytham b. ʿAlī b. Maytham al-Baḥrānī: Multiple Approaches to the Study of Imamate); Oraibi, “Shiʿi Renaissance;” Oraibi, “Rationalism in the School of Bahrain,” 331-43; Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 320-1; Lawson, “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy,” 128. His famous commentary on the *Nahj al-balāgha* is referred to in Nasr, “Shiʿism and Sufism: Their Relationship in Essence and in History,”
is credited with having led the Shiʿi renaissance in post-Mongol Bahrain, stipulated: “We reject the notion that the Hidden Imam cannot appear to his friends (awliyāʾihi). He does appear to them and they take legal rulings (aḥkām) from him. In fact, legal rulings, answers to [legal and theological] questions (masāʾil) and other things have come to them from him in the form of prayers and letters as is well known among the Twelver Shiʿa.”\(^{572}\) Al-Baḥrānī does not provide a single example to support this statement which leaves us asking, what is he referring to? He likely has in mind the aforementioned letters to al-Mufīd, however these letters do not contain any legal rulings on behalf of the Imam. As a sign of how controversial the question remained, with his next breath, al-Baḥrānī backtracks and concedes that there are those who believe that the Imam does not appear to any of his awliyāʾ, even if they are worthy of the favor (wa-in kānū fī ghāyat al-ṣalāḥ wa-l-mahabba wa-l-ḥajja ilayhi). However, he contends that if the Imam chooses not to appear to anyone, it is due to one of two reasons:

First, man, no matter how virtuous he/she is, is inclined to desperately acquire some kind of social recognition. If the Imam appears to somebody who might, for instance, be

\(^{238}\) He should not be mistaken with his teacher, ‘Alī. b. Sulaymān Kamāl al-Dīn (or Jamāl al-Dīn) Baḥrānī (fl. late 7th/13th cent.), one of the scholars often credited with bridging the divide between tashayyuʿ and taṣawwuf in the post-Mongol invasion period; on the latter, see Madelung, “Baḥrānī, Jamāl al-Dīn (also Kamāl al-Dīn),” *EIr*, 3:529.

poor, he may boast about it and cannot help divulging this secret to people close to him like his brother, son or wife. A secret between more than two people would inevitably circulate, and would result in social disorder and corruption (fāsād). Second, in order for him to prove his identity, the Imam has to show his loyal subject some saintly miracles (karāmāt). When the latter doubts them, he would seek the help of others; and if the enemies of the Imam might be among them, he would thus betray the Imam to his enemies.\textsuperscript{573}

\textsuperscript{573} Translated as such in al-Oraibi, “Shī‘ī Renaissance,” 157. It merits noting in this connection that although al-Irbili and al-Baḥrānī seem to both affirm the possibility of seeing the Imam during the Greater Occultation, their more famous student, Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. ‘Alī b. Muṭahhar, known as ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325) [on whom, see Jafri, “al-Ḥillī (1),” EL\textsuperscript{2}, 3:390; Schmidtke, “Ḥelli, Ḥasan b. Yusof b. Moṭahhar,” ELR, 12:164-9], perhaps the most important figure in the development of Shi‘ī fiqh, adopted the position of the early Traditionists. Although later hagiographical sources claim that al-Ḥillī twice encountered the Hidden Imam (see below), he himself in his \textit{Nahj al-mustarshidin fī usūl al-dīn} maintained, “The (Hidden) Imam has concealed himself for either a reason known only to God or because he fears for his life both from his enemies and his friends. He thus does not appear to anyone, publicly or privately (\textit{fa-lā yaẓhar ʿāmmu wa-lā khāṣṣu}).” [This passage from al-Ḥillī’s \textit{Nahj al-mustarshidin} is available to us in al-Miqdād al-Ḥillī’s (d. 826/1423) commentary, \textit{Irshād al-ṭālibīn ilā nahj al-mustarshidin}, 377. Cooper has provided a different translation: “He does not appear in public or privately because of fear for his life from his enemies, and of fear for his friends,” al-Ḥillī, “‘Allāma al-Ḥillī on Imamate and Ijithād, Translated and edited by John Cooper,” 242]. Moreover, al-Ḥillī chose not to address the issue of encountering the Imam in any form in the section of his highly influential summary of Shi‘ī beliefs and doctrines. Al-Ḥillī, \textit{al-Bābu 'l-Ḥādī 'Ashar: A Treatise on the Principles of Shi‘ite Theology} (trans. Miller), 78 [for a revised translation of his creed, see Watt, \textit{Islamic Creeds}, 103-4]. This work is al-Ḥillī’s most popular theological work. See Schmidtke, “Ḥelli, Ḥasan b. Yusof b. Moṭahhar,” ELR, 12:164-9. Jafri, “al-Ḥillī (1),” EL\textsuperscript{2}, 3:390, notes that it has “superseded every other [Shi‘ī creed] in modern times.” The comments by al-Miqdād b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Suyūrī al-Ḥillī (d. 826/1423), known as al-Fāḍil al-Miqdād, about the twelfth Imam in his commentary of al-Ḥillī’s creed which are more involved, also avoid the issue of contact with the Imam, though he does maintain that all of the Imams have performed miracles, referring readers to al-Rāwandi’s \textit{al-Kharā‘īj wa-l-jarā‘īh}. See al-Ḥillī, \textit{al-Bābu 'l-Ḥādī 'Ashar} (trans. Miller), 80-1. On al-Miqdād al-Ḥillī, a well-known scholar and jurist and one of the most prominent students of al-Shahid al-Awwal, see McAuliffe, “Legal Exegesis: Christians as a Case Study,” 69-71 (section titled, al-Miqdād al-Ḥillī); Dihkhudā, \textit{Lughatnāmih}, s.v. ‘Fāḍil-i Miqdād’; Modarressi, \textit{An Introduction to Shi‘i Law}, 49; Karaji, “Fāḍil-i Miqdād: Parchamdār-i pazhūhish.”
4.3. The Oceans of Light and the Opening of the Floodgates

Stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam remained few in the next centuries. However, in the late Safavid period, the initial reticence to affirm continuous contact with the

The only work we know of that is a collection of such stories pre-al-Majlisi is Iraqi scholar Bahāʾ al-Dīn ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Nīlī al-Nāfaji’s (fl. late 8th/early 9th/late 14th/early 15th cent.; d. after 803/1400-1) al-Sulṭān al-mufārrij ‘an ahl al-īmān (īmān raʾā šāḥib al-zamān). On the author, a student of Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqin al-Ḥillī (d. 771/1369-70; son of the famous al-ʿĀlamā al-Hilli), see al-Nīlī, al-Sulṭān al-mufārrij, 6-17 (from the editor’s introduction); al-Nīlī, Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍīʿa, 11-43 (from the publisher’s introduction); Dihkhudā, Lughatnāmih, s.v. “ʿAlī Nīlī”. His nisba al-Nīlī is derived not from the River Nile but rather from the Iraqi town of al-Nīl situated on the Euphrates river between Baghdad and Kufah. See Dihkhudā, Lughatnāmih, s.v. ‘Nil’. Al-Sulṭān al-mufārrij has not survived (al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīʿa, 12:217-8 (no. 1439)), but it was recently (1426/2005-6) reassembled from the stories that are quoted from it in al-Majlisi’s Biḥār al-anwār and al-Nūrī’s Jannat al-maʾwā. The work is mostly stories of encounters with the Imam from the Lesser Occultation but the first six accounts are all stories the author heard from his contemporaries. Each of these short accounts contains the record of a healing miracle performed by the Imam. For example, account no. 6 tells the story of a Shiʿī who tussled with a rival Sunni. Just when it seemed the Shiʿī was about to lose, a stranger (who turned out to be the Hidden Imam) appeared, killed the Sunni and miraculously healed a wound suffered by the Shiʿī during the vigorous fight, al-Nīlī, al-Sulṭān al-mufārrij, 37-50.

Al-Nīlī also devoted a chapter of a different work which has survived, his Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍīʿa [fī dhikr al-qāʾim al-ḥujja ʿalayhi al-salām] to “those who saw (the Imam).” This chapter includes fourteen accounts, all of which are found in earlier works that deal with sightings of the Imam during the Lesser Occultation, al-Nīlī, Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍīʿa, 251-95. The chapter ends with a list of the names of those who served as the Imam’s deputies in various regions during the Lesser Occultation, cited from al-Ṣadūq’s Kamāl al-dīn. Al-Nīlī next responds to those who claim that these are all isolated accounts (akhbār āḥād) which may as well be unfounded fables and superstitions (bi-manzilat al-ḥikāyāt wa-l-khurāfāt) that do not prove that the Imam exists. Al-Nīlī’s response is very telling. In answering this assertion, he appeals to the power of deduction (al-istidlāl). He says that just as the recognition of God, the Prophet and the previous Imams are not conditioned on actually seeing them, one can recognize and believe in the Hidden Imam without seeing him for “the Imamate and seeing (the Imam) are not mutually exclusive. Rather, each one is sufficient in and of itself” (fa-l-imāma
Hidden Imam gave way to an effort to begin collecting the accounts, chiefly by the well-known scholar Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlīsī (d. 1111/1699-1700).⁵⁷⁵

Al-Majlīsī himself does not cite many accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation in his works, showing again that such stories continued to be uncommon. For example, he could only find six accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam to include in a chapter of the volume of his Biḥār al-anwār [Oceans of light] devoted to the ghayba of the Hidden Imam and completed in Rajab 1078/1667-8.⁵⁷⁶ The chapter is titled, wa-ruʿya lā yatawaqqaf ʿaḥaduhumā ʿalā al-ākhar bal kull wāḥid thāḥib ʿalā ḥidatihi), al-Nīlī, Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍīʾa, 299. In other words, al-Nīlī is arguing that it is not necessary for the Imam to be seen though it is not impossible either.


“Rare (nādir) are the accounts of those who have seen (the Hidden Imam) during the Greater Occultation close to our time.”

However, al-Majlisi’s most significant and far-reaching contribution to the subject was his attempt to negotiate the palpable epistemological tension between the “lying impostors” passage of the final tawqiʿ and the few stories of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation. Al-Majlisi concluded that the final tawqiʿ did not intend to seal the possibility of seeing the Imam and receiving guidance from him. Rather, the underlying rationale behind the tawqiʿ was to abolish the institution of sifāra with the death of the fourth representative, and thus negate the appearance of any future special intermediary between the Imam and the faithful who knew his location and could contact him at any time. The trusted and pious believers, i.e. the ulama who by now constituted the general representatives (al-nuwwāb al-ʿāmma) of the Imam, could see him, al-Majlisi argued, so as long as they did not advance any

577 For a translation of accounts mentioned in this chapter, see Ghaemmaghami, “Numinous Vision, Messianic Encounters.” The bulk of the chapter is dedicated to the story of the Green Island in the White Sea. Al-Majlisi prefaces the story with these comments: “I found a treatise famously known (risāla mushtahira) as the story of the Green Island in the White Sea and decided to include it [in this volume] as it is the story of someone who saw (the Hidden Imam) and because it contains has many strange things (al-gharāʾib). I chose to place it in a separate chapter because I could not find (the account) [mentioned in] any credible sources.” Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-anwār, 52:159; Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 131 (note 79). On the story of the Green Island and information about its provenance, see now Ghaemmaghami, “To the Abode of the Hidden One.”
simultaneous claims to being the Imam’s authorized intermediary, a position that was reserved for the *sufārāʾ*, who were cast as the Imam’s special representatives (*al-nuwwāb al-khāṣṣa*).\(^{578}\)

Al-Majlisi concluded: “Perhaps (*laʿalla*) the last *tawqīṭ* concerns those who claim to be the Imam’s representative [and] to convey information to the Shi’a [from the Imam], as was the case with the [four] *sufārāʾ*. For if this were not the case, (the final *tawqīṭ*) would contradict the stories of those who have seen (the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation).”\(^{579}\) After translating the last *tawqīṭ* in his last completed work, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn dar uṣūl va firūʿ-i iʿtiqādāt*...
[The truth of certitude (Qur’an 56:95, 69:51) concerning the roots and branches of faith], an extensive Persian summary of the main tenets and doctrines of Shi'i Islam,\textsuperscript{580} al-Majlisi makes the same argument and adds, “Many trustworthy people (thiqāt) have narrated that they have seen (the Imam) during the Greater Occultation without having recognized him at the moment (of seeing him). Therefore, it is possible that the intention (murād) of this hadith [i.e., the final tawqī'\textsuperscript{7}] is that if they claim to have seen him and simultaneously recognized him, they are lying; conversely, if they claim to be (the Imam’s) representative (niyābat) by virtue of having seen (the Imam), they are [likewise] lying.”\textsuperscript{581}

Al-Majlisi also weighs in on the question in commenting on the famous hadith of the sun and the clouds mentioned in chapter 1 of our study: “The sun can partially emerge from the clouds and when it does, one person may see it while another does not. In the same way, during the days of his ghayba, (the Imam) may appear to some people and not to others” (fā-kadhālik

\textsuperscript{580} Haqq al-yaqīn was completed one year before his passing and is said to have been the cause of the conversion of 70,000 Sunnis to Shi'i Islam though it is stringently anti-Sunni (a characteristic feature of all of al-Majlisi’s works). See Hairi, “Madjlisi, Mulla Muḥammad Bāqir,” \textit{EI}², 5:1087; Brunner, “Majlesi, Moḥammad-Bāqer,” \textit{EIr} (online edition), both of whom are citing a report from a late 13th/19th century work, the \textit{Qiṣaṣ al-ʿulamāʾ} (completed in 1290/1873-4) by Moḥammad b. Sulaymān Tunikābunī (d. 1302/1885). I have not been able to find an earlier reference to this mass-conversion claim.
yūmkin an yāzhar fī ayyām ghaybatīhi li-baʿd al-khālq dūn baʿd). He translates the same explanation in Ḥaqq al-yaqīn but then refers to two of the hadiths we discussed in chapter 2: “Imam al-Ṣādiq said that the Qāʾim will have two ghaybas, one short and the other long. He said that during his [first] ghayba, only the select among his Shīʿa (khavāss-i shīʿiyān-i ĩ) would know his location, while during the second ghayba, only the privileged elite (makhsūsān) and the mawālī of (the Imam) would know his location. And in a different hadith, it has been mentioned that thirty of (the Imam’s) privileged elite (sī nafar az makhsūsān) are perpetually in his service, i.e., when one dies, another takes his place.”

Al-Majlisi’s opinion has served as the established position on the “lying impostors” sentence of the final tawqīʿ since his time and is cited in virtually every work after him that includes encounter stories or deals with questions surrounding the ghayba. Yet not everyone is convinced. In the early 13th/19th century, Shaykh Jaʿfar al-Najafi, known as Kāshif al-Ghitāʾ

581 Majlisi, Ḥaqq al-yaqīn, 316. For a different translation, see Amir-Arjomand, The Shadow of God, 162. On al-Majlisi’s decision to write several of his works in Persian, see Momen, An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam, 116.


583 Majlisi, Ḥaqq al-yaqīn, 345-6.

584 See the addendum to this chapter.
(d. 1227/1812), the polemical champion of the Uṣūlī school and archenemy of Mīrzā Muḥammad Akhbārī (d. 1232/1816-7), the leading exponent of the Akhbārī cause in the late 18th/early 19th century, openly called into the question the veracity all of the encounter accounts from the Greater Occultation, many of which had been cited in works of Akhbārī scholars. In his al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn fi tašwīb al-mujtahidin wa-takhti‘at juhhāl al-akhbārīyyin [The conspicuous truth in vindicating the mujtahids (i.e., the Uṣūlīs) and refuting the ignorant among the Akhbāris], Kāshif al-Ghiṭā blasts Shī‘i scholars before him – and in particular, “unenlightened” Akhbāris – for, inter alia, their indiscriminate use of hadiths and uncritical reliance on strange stories and narrations. To make his point, he adduces the story of the


586 See, e.g., al-Kāshānī (d. ca. 1091/1680), Nawādir al-akhbār, 300-5 (no. 2); al-ʿĀmīlī (d. 1104/1693), Ithbāṭ al-hudā, 5:335-6 (no. 159); H. al-Bāhrānī (d. 1107/1695-96 or 1109/1697-98), Tabsīrat al-walī (see Appendix I); al-Jazāʿirī (d. 1112/1701), Riyāḍ al-ābrār fī manāqib al-aʾimma al-āṯār, 3:135-45; Y. al-Bāhrānī (d. 1186/1773), Kashkūl al-Bāhrānī aw anīṣ al-musāfīr wa-jālīs al-khāṭir, 98-108

587 On this work, see Algar, “Kāšef al-ğeṭā,” Elr (online edition); Rajabī, Ulamā-yi mujāhid, 381; al-Ṭahrānī, al-Dhāriʿa, 7:37-8 (no. 190), who points out that Mīrzā Muḥammad al-Akhbārī promptly wrote a response to al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn called al-Ṣayḥa bi-l-ḥaqq ʿalā man alhada wa-tazandaqa (The cry for truth against he who abandoned his faith and became a heretic) which does not appear to have survived.
Green Island, which as we mentioned was recorded by al-Majlisī in the *Biḥār al-anwār*. He accuses al-Majlisī and other Akhbārī and Akhbārī-leaning scholars who have transmitted these stories of having found them in unreliable sources filled with fabricated tales and useless fables. Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ is unable to suppress his incredulity at what he considers an overly lax attitude on part of these scholars toward the final *tawqiʿ* of the Hidden Imam and other hadiths which he does not identify but by which he almost certainly has in mind the hadiths discussed in chapter 1 of our study: “It’s as if they have never seen the hadiths affirming that no one can see [the Imam] during the Greater Occultation (*wa-ka-annahu lam yara al-akhbār al-dālla ʿalā ʿadam wuqūʿ min aḥad, baʾd al-ghayba al-kubrā*) and refuse to follow the words of the ulama who have affirmed this (to be the truth) (*wa-lā tatbaʿ kalimāt al-ʿulamāʾ al-dālla ʿalā dhālik*).”

In the same connection, Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ rebukes Akhbārī scholars for their “ludicrous accounts (*al-aqwāl al-ʿajība*) and bizarre fabrications (*al-muzakhrafāt al-gharība*) that

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not even an ignoramus would dream of publishing, let alone the sane of mind." A contemporary of Kāshif al-Ghiṭā’, the Bahraini hadith scholar Muḥammad Āl ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. after 1250/1834-5) adopted a more sober tone while arguing in his *Hady al-ʿuqūl ilā aḥādīth al-uṣūl* [Guiding the minds of men to the traditions [of the *ahl al-bayt*] concerning the principles (of religion)] that stories of reputed contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation are not consistent with the doctrine of the Imam’s concealment (*yunāfī al-ghayba*) and can in no way be substantiated by rational or traditional proofs. As our study has shown, this position restates the view of the early Traditionists, al-Nuʿmānī and al-Ṣadūq.

Despite these few voices of protest, it is clear that al-Majlisī’s interpretation of the final *tawqīf* opened once and for all the flood gates. It was tantamount to a *carte blanche* for

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591 Beginning with two of al-Majlisī’s contemporaries, Mir Lawḥī (*fl.* 11th/17th cent) and Hāshim al-Bahrānī (d. 1107/1695-96 or 1109/1697-98), both of whom wrote works after the completion of volume 13 of al-Majlisī’s *Biḥār al-anwār* that refer to accounts of meetings with the Imam during the Greater Occultation. See the Appendix of this dissertation for their works. In addition, one of al-Majlisī’s most gifted students, Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmilī al-Ṭīfahānī (d. ca. 1139/1726-27), is said to have recorded several accounts of Greater Occultation encounters in his *Diyāʾ al-ʿālamīn fī al-imāma* and maintained that there are many “credible reports” (*al-manqūlāt al-muʿtabara*) of those who near his own time who have seen the Hidden Imam. His words are cited by al-Nūrī, *Jannat al-maʾwā*, 95; Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:694; and Kūrānī, *Ḥawl ruʿyat al-mahdī al-muntazār*, 55 (via Nūrī). The volume of *Diyāʾ al-ʿālamīn fī al-imāma* that mentions these accounts has never been published though three manuscripts in Najaf and...
scholars who cited (and continue to cite) his explanation to justify their work to compile, codify and publish collections of accounts of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, in particular as a means of responding to competing notions of authority advanced by “heterodox” movements, as patently illustrated in the collections of the late 19th century polemicist Maytham al-ʻIrāqi (d. 1306/1888-9, 1308/1890-1 or 1310/1892-3), the sedulous Traditionist Nūrī (d. 1320/1902) – the author of two collections of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation – and the latter’s prolific students.592

In addition to “proving (the) weighty matter of the Imam’s existence and the fact that he appears from time to time to meet with his most pious disciples,,”593 such collections have


593 Al-Nūrī, Jannat al-ma‘wā, 11. In his Najm-i thāqib, 574, Nūrī writes that “the main purpose of recording these stories is to prove the blessed existence of the Imam, [demonstrate] that he lives among the people, and [show] how his existence benefits them.” In speaking about these works near the end of his life, he proudly boasted: “We elucidated the possibility of seeing (the Hidden Imam) during the Greater Occultation in a conclusive manner in our work, Jannat al-ma‘wā, and in our book, al-Najm-i
drawn believers closer to the Imam and strengthened the authority and charisma of the ulama. Moreover, the narratives compiled by these scholars have often served a polemical agenda to prove the continued existence of the Hidden Imam to three groups of ‘opponents’: the “weak” followers of the Imam who entertained doubts about his existence; the unbelievers in the Imam (viz., non-Shīʿī Muslims and non-Muslims); and any group that sought to challenge the authority of the ulama (e.g., Ṣūfī orders) or rupture the eschatological tension caused by the ghayba.

The modern collections of encounter narratives by these scholars suddenly feature over hundreds of stories of prominent ulama who have met the Imam throughout the Greater Occultation. It is of no minor note that one of al-Nūrī’s collections has been conveniently appended to the volume of al-Majlisi’s Bihār al-anwār that deals with the life, occultation and return of the Hidden Imam (vol. 13 of the lithograph = vols. 51-3 of printed edition), giving the impression that such encounters have always been a part of the story of the Hidden Imam. In some of these accounts, the Imam no longer simply cures seemingly incurable thāqib. We mentioned so many proofs and evidences [i.e., encounter stories] that not a trace of doubt exists about (this matter).” Nūrī, Khātimat mustadrak al-wasāʾil, 3:229.

ailments or helps groups of Shi'a threatened by highwaymen as some of the earlier stories relate. Rather, he is re-transformed or most aptly re-turned into the source of religious knowledge for his representatives, the ulama. We can mention here four representative examples from the many that exist:

(1) ʿAllama al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325): As alluded to earlier, two accounts of al-Ḥillī’s encounters with the Hidden Imam are transmitted in later sources. The first is an account of a stranger who accompanied al-Ḥillī from Ḥilla to Karbala. Al-Ḥillī posed a number of legal questions to him, all of which he ably answered. The stranger went so far as to mention a hadith that al-Ḥillī was unaware of, giving him the book, page number and line where it was found (al-Ḥillī, it is said, later found the hadith in the exact location the stranger mentioned). Al-Ḥillī then asked him whether or not the Imam could be seen during the Greater Occultation (showing once again, the centrality of this question). Just then, his whip fell to the ground. The stranger picked it up and as he handed it to al-Ḥillī, revealed himself to be the Hidden Imam and immediately disappeared.595 The second is an account in which an unnamed Sunnī scholar

595 See Nahāvandī, Barakāt-i ḥadrat-i vali-i ʿaṣr, 176-7, who gives as his source, Muḥammad b. al-Amīr al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī al-Ḥā’irī’s (d. 1242/1826) Mafātīḥ al-usūl wa-manāhil al-fiqh (on this work, see al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīʿa, 21:300 (no. 5173), who claims to have seen the account in al-Ḥillī’s own handwriting on the margins of one of al-Ḥillī’s books [we have no way of verifying this]; Ishtihārdī, “Guzari bar zindigī-ı ʿAllāmah Hillī,” 22-4; ʿIrāqī-Maythami, Dār al-salām, 506-9 (from Tunikābunī’s (d. 1302/1885) Qīṣaṣ
had written a polemical book against the Shi‘a. Dissimulating his faith, al-Ḥillī was able to beguile him into borrowing the book for one night in order to copy it so that he might write a response. Al-Ḥillī, however, fell asleep midway through the night. The Imam appeared (whether in a dream or while he was awake, the text is not clear) and told al-Ḥillī that he himself would copy the book, a task which would have taken al-Ḥillī almost a year to complete on his own. When al-Ḥillī awoke in the morning, the book had been fully copied.596

__596__ See al-Shūshtarī, _Majālis al-muʾminīn_, 1:573 > al-Nūrī, _Jannat al-maʾwā_, 69-70 (no. 22), who concludes that the encounter took place in a dream; Nūrī, _Najm-i thāqib_, 346-7 (no. 15); Nahāvandi, _Barakāt-i ḥadrat-i valī-i ʿāsr_, 179-80; Dhākiri, “Īrtībāt bā imām-i zamān,” 101; al-Mūsawī, _al-Liqāʾ al-mahdawī_, 144 (from Tunikābūnī); William M. Miller (d. 1993), an American Presbyterian missionary in Iran, mentions this account in the introduction to his 1928 translation of al-Ḥillī’s creedal statement. See al-Ḥillī, _al-Bābu ʿl-Hādī ʿAshar_: A Treatise on the Principles of Shi‘ite Theology (trans. Miller), xiii-xiv. Cf. a similar story related about Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659-60). It is said that on a journey to Karbala, al-Majlisī met two strangers on horses. As they travelled together, the two men posed questions about religious matters to al-Majlisī. Al-Majlisī then learned that the two men were none other than Imam Ḥusayn and the Hidden Imam. See Babayan, _Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs_, 426, 463; Rahnema, _Superstition as Ideology in Iranian Politics_, 175.
(2) Al-Muḥaqqiq ʿAbd al-Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ardabili, known as al-Muqaddas al-Ardabili (d. 993/1585), a scholarly giant of the Safavid period from Najaf who “developed his own special and independent legal method which gave rise to a distinct and significant school.” He is reported to have experienced a number of visions of the Hidden Imam from whom he received solutions to theological and legal problems (masāʾil ʿilmiyya). In one account, he was followed in the middle of the night by one of his students to the Masjid al-Kūfa. The student saw and heard him pose questions to a stranger at the mosque’s miḥrāb. When the same student later confronted him about what he had seen, al-Ardabili revealed, on condition that the student not mention what he shared with anyone while he was still alive, that the stranger was none other than the Hidden Imam.

597 On al-Ardabili, see Madelung, “Ardabili,” EIr, 2:368-70; Momen, An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam, 311.

598 Modarressi, An Introduction to Shīʿī Law, 51.

599 Nūrī, Najm-i ṭāqīb, 2:694-6 (account no. 63), citing from al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī’s Diyāʾ al-ʿālamīn who is citing from al-Jazāʾiri’s d. 1112/1700-1) (a student of al-Majlisī) al-Anwār al-nuʿmāniyya. [The earliest source for this account is al-Majlisī, Biḥār al-anwār, 52:174-6 > Y. al-Bahrānī, Kashkūl, 108-9]. In the same pages, Nūrī provides a second version of the story from a different source that is very similar to the first version. The original account is also cited in Ardabili, Ḥadiqat al-Shīʿa, dāl (from the publisher’s introduction); ‘Irāqī-Maythami, Dār al-salām, 497-9 (no. 9; Persian translation of Biḥār al-anwār); al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdī, Ilzām al-nāṣib, 2:42-3 (from Biḥār al-anwār); Nahāvandi, Barakāt-i ḡaḍrat-i valī-i ʿāsr, 72; ‘Alīpūr, Jīlvah-ḥā-yi pinhānī-i imām-i ʿāsr, 131-3 (from al-Anwār al-nuʿmāniyya); Kūrānī, Ḥawl ruʿyat al-mahdī al-muntaṣar, 51; al-Mūsawi, al-Liqāʾ al-mahdawi, 144; al-Jahrami, Rīḍyat al-
(3) Muḥammad Mahdī b. Murtaḍā al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, known as Baḥr al-ʿUlūm (d. 1212/1797), when asked by Mīrzā Abū al-Qāsim al-Qummi (d. 1231/1816), author of the influential fiqh work, *al-Qawānīn al-muḥkama fī al-uṣūl*,\(^{600}\) about how he became so knowledgeable, responded that he would tell him on condition that he did not divulge the secret to anyone and proceeded to credit an encounter with the Imam who transferred “knowledge, holiness, inspiration and learning” (*al-ʿilm wa-l-qudsiyya wa-l-wahy wa-l-faḍl*) to his heart by embracing him inside the Maṣjid al-Kūfa.\(^{601}\)

(4) Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī (d. 1281/1864), the first universally recognized source of emulation (*marjīʿ al-taqlīd*) and the founder of a new school of Shiʿi law still dominant today.\(^{602}\)

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who according to an account transmitted by a student, would leave his home in Najaf in the middle of the night, and meet the Imam at his home (the location of which only he knew). When confronted by his student one night who was following him, al-Anşârî revealed that whenever he is faced with a theological or legal question that he cannot resolve, he visits the home of the Hidden Imam and poses his question to him. Like al-Ardabîli, al-Anşârî makes the students swear an oath to keep what he has told him a secret so long as al-Anşârî is alive.\footnote{Irâqi-Maythamî, Dâr al-salâm, 511-2 (no. 17), himself a student of al-Anşârî, who says he heard the account from another student, Mirzâ Ḥasan Āshtiyânî. See also Anşârî-Ahwâz, Zindigânî va shakhṣiyat-i Shaykh Anşârî, 106-7; Nahâvandî, Barakât-i hadrat-i valî-i ‘asr, 177-8; ‘Alîpûr, Ji.lvah-hâ-yi pinhâni-i imâm-i ‘asr, 134-5; al-Mûsawî, al-Arbâ‘în fi al-Mahdî wa-qîssat al-jazîra al-khaḍrâ‘; 30-1 (from Ḥasan Abţâhi’s al-Kamâlât al-rûhiyya); Faqîh, Liqâ‘ât al-‘ulamâ‘ bi-l-imâm al-ḥujja, 145-6.}

### 4.4. Conclusion

It is difficult to read such accounts without recalling that such direct recourse to the Hidden Imam (including knowing his location) is precisely what is attributed to the *sufârâ‘* and *wukalâ‘* during the Lesser Occultation – and had not been witnessed since their time. As we have seen, in the earliest Greater Occultation accounts, the Imam was portrayed predominantly as a consoler, healer, helper-in-peril and miracle worker. The first of these accounts, the story of the youth and the Black Stone, is said to have occurred some ten years after the death of the

“The Establishment of the Position of Marja‘iyyat-i Taqlid in the Twelver-Shi‘i Community;” Kazemi-Moussavi, “The Institutionalization of Marja‘-i Taqlîd in the Nineteenth Century Shi‘ite Community.”
last *safīr* and the start of the Greater Occultation in what we argue is an attempt to portray the Greater Occultation as a natural and uncomplicated extension of the Lesser Occultation. Not enough is known about Shiʿī Islam in the late Abbasid period to draw conclusions as to why this is when such accounts begin to appear, especially in the works of Ibn Ṭāwūs. The fall of Abbasid caliphate must certainly have provided the requisite space to foreground the Hidden Imam and emphasize his authority and temporal presence. It is also clear from the various messianic movements that appeared after the fall of Baghdad that the Mongol invasion deeply heightened messianic susceptibilities. In this light, it is possible to read Ibn Ṭāwūs’s attempts to accentuate encounters with the Imam as a way of preparing his readers for what he perceived to be the Imam’s imminent return. In any case, as we have shown, it is only beginning in the Safavid period that the accounts become more embellished and the Imam is in effect transformed from being primarily a miracle worker to a teacher, scholar and recourse for the ulama strengthening their influence as the Imam’s “general representatives.”

4.5. **Addendum**

Let us recall that the Safavid scholar, al-Majlisi interpreted the “lying impostors” sentence of the final *tawqiʿ* of the Hidden Imam is applying only those who both claim to have see the Imam *and* claim to be his exclusive representative (like the four *sufārāʾ* from the Lesser
Occultation). Al-Majlisi’s interpretation of this sentence has served as the established position on the issue as evidenced by the fact that it is cited by numerous scholars after him. To illustrate this point, we will mention here ten prominent scholars who have embraced and/or enhanced his interpretation of the final tawqīʿ in their writings about the Hidden Imam:

(1) The scholar and Qur’an commentator ʿAbd Allāh al-Shubbar (d. 1242/1826-7), who cited al-Majlisi’s explanation almost verbatim to validate stories from the Greater Occultation of “large numbers of pious and trustworthy scholars of the past and present” who have met the Hidden Imam.\(^{604}\)

(2/3) Mahmūd ʿIrāqī-Maythami (d. 1306/1888-9, 1308/1890-1 or 1310/1892-3) and Nūrī (d. 1320/1902), both of whom quote al-Majlisi’s explanation verbatim in chapters of their collections devoted to reconciling the final tawqīʿ and hadiths stating that the Hidden Imam cannot be seen with stories in their collections of those who have encountered him during the Greater Occultation.\(^{605}\)

\(^{604}\) Al-Shubbar, al-Anwār lil-ʿAllāma fī sharḥ ziyārat [sic] al-jāmiʿa, 36. Al-Shubbar, however, does not refer to any of the Greater Occultation encounter stories in the chapter on the twelfth Imam in his extensive exposition of core Shiʿi doctrines and beliefs, see Shubbar, Haqq al-yaqīn fī maʿrifat usūl al-dīn, 283-91. On the author, see the introduction to his Qur’an commentary, al-Shubbar, Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿāṣim, 56-7.

\(^{605}\) ʿIrāqī-Maythami, Dār al-salām, 193; Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 2:852; al-Nūrī, Jannat al-ʿawwā, 146. See below, Appendix, for descriptions of these works.
(4) The celebrated Lebanese scholar and Shi'ī biographer Muḥsin al-Amin (d. 1377/1957-8), who while conceding that “there are hadiths that establish the impossibility of seeing [the Imam] (dālla ʿalā ʿadam imkān al-ruʾya) during the Greater Occultation,” argued that the way to reconcile these hadiths with the accounts describing encounters with the Imam is to declare as unbelievers anyone who claims to have both seen the Imam and “to deliver information on his behalf as the [four] representatives did [during the Lesser Occultation]” (wa-ʾīṣāl al-akhbār min jānibihi ʿalā mithāl al-sufārā).  

(5) Mujtabā Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī (d. 1386/1967), who maintained that the final tawqīʿ sought not only to prevent harmful innovations and heretical teachings (bidʿat-hā) from being introduced into Shi'ī Islam but also to comminate and anathematize anyone who claims to be the Imam’s special representative during the Greater Occultation “like the Ṣūfī poles, the Shaykhi fourth pillars (rukn-i rābiʿ-i shaykhiyyah), as well as those who claim to be the Mahdī (himself).” He then decried the fact that “this blessed narration” issued by “the source of inspiration and the dawning-place of revelation (maʿdin-i vaḥy va maṭlaʿ-i tanzīl)” has not been

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studied, reflected on and accepted by all of the Shi‘a for if it had, such claimants who divided the Shi‘i community and caused great suffering to the Shi‘a would never have appeared.  

(6) ʿAlī Davānī (d. 1427/2007), who asserted that the tawqīʿ anathematizes anyone who claims to be the Imam’s representative or the Imam himself, giving the example of Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb; otherwise, it is entirely possible for pious and righteous Shi‘a and the devoted friends (dūstān-i khālis) of the Imam to see him during the Greater Occultation but choose to not tell anyone. Davānī then argued that eminent scholars like al-Murtaḍā, al-Ṭūsī and Bahr al-ʿUlūm al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī have all affirmed that “the Shi‘i ulama do not believe that the Imam of the Age cannot appear to his righteous friends (dūstān-i pāksirisht). On the contrary, it is certainly possible for them to see the Imam and either recognize or not recognize him. All of our great scholars like al-Kulaynī and al-Ṣadūq have narrated stories of such encounters in their works.”

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608 Davānī’s explanation is added to his translation of al-Majlisī’s explanation. See Majlisī, Mahdī-i mawʿūd (trans. Davānī), 929 (note 1), 943 (note 1).

609 Majlisī, Mahdī-i mawʿūd (trans. Davānī), 943 (note 1).
(7) The prolific Iraqi scholar Bāqir Sharīf al-Qurashi (d. 1433/2012), who argued that there are many ways to reconcile the tension between the final tawqīf and the well-attested (tawātur) stories transmitted by “many people from among the greatest and most righteous Shiʿī ulama” who have definitely (min al-maqṭūʿ) seen the Imam. However, he mentions only one, which he considered the best (ajwad) explanation (al-tawjīh): anyone who claims to have seen the Imam and likewise claims to be the Imam’s representative (safīr/nāʾib) is a lying impostor.\textsuperscript{610} Elsewhere, al-Qurashi avers that during the Greater Occultation, “the great jurists (al-fuqahāʾ al-ʿiẓām) became the sources of emulation (marjiʿiyya) and adopted [the position of] the most great representation (al-niyyāba al-ʿuẓmā) from the eagerly awaited Imam. During (the Greater Occultation), the Imam has had numerous encounters and corresponded often with prominent ulama” (kānat lil-imām ʿiddat iltiqātāt wa-murāsalāt maʿa ʿuyūn al-ʿulamā).\textsuperscript{611} Only one such scholar is named by him: al-Mufid, who as we mentioned in chapter 3, is alleged to have received two short letters from the Hidden Imam.

(8) Contemporary scholar Ḥabīb Ṭāhirī, who concedes that “some” reject the stories of encounters with the Imam based on hadiths (rivāyāt) that state that whoever claims to have seen

\textsuperscript{610} Al-Qurashi, Ḥayāt al-imām al-mahdī, 130-1, 134.

\textsuperscript{611} Al-Qurashi, Ḥayāt al-imām al-mahdī, 133-4.
the Imam or encountered him should be declared a liar. Who are they? He does not say explicitly but does mention that we are living at a time when “the enemies of the Imam claim that [these stories] are lies.” Ṭāhirī responds to these naysayers by first arguing that it is not hadiths plural, but rather one hadith, that declares all those who claim to have seen the Imam to be frauds: the last tawqīʿ of the Hidden Imam. He then argues that the key word in the final tawqīʿ is “impostor” (muftir) which suggests that the tawqīʿ does not intend to condemn everyone who has encountered the Imam as liars but rather only those who have both seen him and claim to be his exclusive representative. Responding to the question of why the Imam did not appoint specific ulama as his special representatives during the Greater Occultation as he did during the Lesser Occultation with the sufarāʾ, Ṭāhirī reasons that it is because “the enemies of the Imam” would attempt to apprehend and torture such representatives in order to

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613 Ṭāhirī, Simā-yi āflāb: Sayrī dar zindigī-i ḡadrat-i mahdī, 309.
force them to show them the Imam’s location (so that they might kill him); and if they refused, the enemies would incarcerate them for life. 614

(9) Contemporary Najaf based scholar ʿAlī al-Sabzavārī, son and student of Grand Ayatollah ʿAbd al-Aʿlā al-Sabzavārī (d. 1414/1993), who argues that the final tawqīʿ “established the position of general representation (al-niyāba al-ʿāmma) for the fuqahāʾ and the mujtahids.” 615 Al-Sabzavārī goes on to say that the ulama who have been favored with meeting the Hidden Imam have attained a level of spiritual maturity (al-kamāl), truthfulness (al-ṣidq), and loyalty (al-wafāʾ) that others can attest to, citing the examples of al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī and Bahr al-ʿUlūm al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. 616 He maintains that the ulama who saw the Imam were ordered to keep their encounters with him a secret (maʾmūr bi-l-kitmān) so long as they lived. It was their students and close associates who revealed that they had met the Imam after they died. 617

(10) Contemporary Grand Ayatollah Luṭf Allāh Gulpāyigānī, who after repeating al-Majlisi’s interpretation of the tawqīʿ, adduces the many “famous, well-authenticated stories” of


615 Al-Sabzavārī, ʿUmr al-Imām al-Mahdī, 68.


617 Al-Sabzavārī, ʿUmr al-Imām al-Mahdī, 65.
ulama who have met the Imam as proof that the tawqīʿ did not intend to reject the possibility of seeing the Imam during the Greater Occultation.\footnote{Gulpāyigānī, Imāmat va mahdaviyyat, 2:475; Gulpāyigānī, Pāsukh-i dah pursish, 64-5.} He goes so far as to aver that “an intelligent person would never entertain any doubt about the soundness” of these stories. Gulpāyigānī speculates that perhaps the intent of the tawqīʿ is to reject anyone who claims that he has the ability to see the Imam at will, i.e., to meet the Imam whenever he wishes. Another possibility he considers is that the tawqīʿ intends to say that those who see the Imam must not divulge the secret of their encounter. However, Gulpāyigānī leave open the possibility that certain individuals are capable of seeing the Imam at will but even these people should never express publicly that they have this power; otherwise, according to his reading of the tawqīʿ, they must be denounced as liars.\footnote{Gulpāyigānī, Imāmat va mahdaviyyat, 2:475; Gulpāyigānī, Pāsukh-i dah pursish, 65.} Elsewhere, Gulpāyigānī asserts that alongside hadiths ascribed to the previous Imams foretelling the ghayba of the Qāʾim, the stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam constitute the greatest proof of his existence.\footnote{Gulpāyigānī, Imāmat va mahdaviyyat, 2:45-6. Other scholars in recent years who have repeated al-Majlisi’s explanation, though not always given him credit, include: al-Shirāzī, Kalimat al-Imām al-Mahdī, 203 (note 2); al-Mūsawi, al-Arbaʿīn fī al-Mahdī, 13; al-ʿAṭṭār, “Muqaddimat al-muḥaqiq,” 22; al-Shāhrūdī, al-Imām al-Mahdī wa-ẓuhūrūh, 176 (note 1); Āl ʿUṣfūr, Ẓāhirat al-ghayba wa-ḍaʿwā al-sifāra fī zill imāmat al-mahdī al-muntażar, 20 (of the appendix); Khādimī-Shīrāzī, Tuḥfah-yi imām mahdī, 138-40; Ayatollah Khalīl Kamarahʾī (d. 1363AS/1984), Davāzdahumīn imām va falsafah-yi ghabat-i Mahdī, sīn-ḥāʾ, who states that the final tawqīʿ of the Imam ended the function of exclusive...}
General Conclusion

In late 2003, Ayatollah ʿAlī Mishkīnī (d. 2007) met the Hidden Imam. In the course of the weekly sermon in Qum on 11 June 2004, Mishkīnī, the first chairman of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s powerful Assembly of Experts and one of the most influential ulama in the country’s clerical oligarchy, described how seven months earlier, he saw the Hidden Imam as angels presented him with a list of the names and addresses of each member of the new parliament. The Imam proceeded to sign the list, sealing it with his stamp of approval. 621 Ayatollah Mishkīnī’s statement came on the heels of a parliamentary election pocked with controversy. In the run-up to the election, most reformist candidates had been disqualified by a peremptory ban

representation (niyābat-i khāṣṣah). Thereafter, whoever claims to be the special representative of the Imam or based on that claim (yā bar ṭibq-i ān), alleges to have seen the Imam is a liar and an impostor; and Ayatollah Muḥsin Arākī (b. 1956), who “No one has the power to see Imam Mahdi in latter’s Ghaybet [i.e., the Greater Occultation]. Ghaybet itself means being inaccessible/invisible to the people at large. However it is the privilege of the Imam that when and where he deems necessary he meets his representative(s) to clarify/explain any ideological or jurisprudential issue, which is beyond the perception of an ordinary human being. Therefore it is not acceptable if one claims of seeing the Imam, but the possibility cannot be ruled out about someone’s contact with the Imam. There are people who have the blessing of having an audience with the imam, which is usually mentioned in the authentic Shia books on ideology.” Araki, Ideological & Jurisprudential Frontiers of Islam (Part I) (trans. Shīrāzī), 28-9. Arākī is a prominent Iraqi-born Shīʿī scholar, prolific and influential writer, and politician. He is a former member of the Assembly of Experts in Iran, previously served as Ayatollah Khamenei’s personal representative in London, and currently serves as the Secretary-General of the International Organization for Islamic Rapprochement.
issued by twelve jurists that compose Iran’s supreme legislative body, the Guardian Council. The implication of Mishkini’s claim was not lost on many: having encountered the Hidden Imam, he had been privy to the Imam’s will: only allies of the clerical conservatives could serve in parliament. To those in tune with the beat of Iran’s hierocracy, Ayatollah Mishkini’s claim of a tête-à-tête with the Imam came as no surprise. What may have been surprising is the fact he chose to disclose it publicly. In a recent ethnographic study based on extensive field research, Swedish anthropologist David Thurfjell has observed that while Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah ‘Ali Khāmini’ī, has never publicly made such a claim, many Shī‘a firmly believe that “he has direct contact with the hidden Imam. Stories verifying such notions are not uncommon in the community…One such story relates an incident when Khāmene’i was overheard talking to a mysterious stranger who was supposedly [the] Imam Mahdi himself.”

621 See Barzugar, “Namāyandigān-i majlis: muntakhabān-i mardum yā manṣūbin-i imām-i zamān?” (Members of Parliament: Elected by the People or Appointed by the Imam of the Age?).

622 Thurfjell, Living Shi’ism: Instances of Ritualisation among Islamist Men in Contemporary Iran, 163. Not surprising, there are also numerous reports in circulation of Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989) having met the Hidden Imam and several ulama close to him have said publicly that Khomeini’s decisions and actions were inspired by the Hidden Imam, see Kūrānī, al-Karamāt al-ghaybiyya lil-imām al-Khumaynī, 82. Such stories are surprisingly seldom cited in scholarship about Khomeini and the source of his charisma. For example, in 1973-4, while he was in prison, Ayatollah Ḥā‘īrī-Shirāzī claimed to have dreamt of Khomeini delivering a sermon. A man entered while he was speaking and Khomeini cried out that the man was the Hidden Imam and asked him for assistance. The next day, Ḥā‘īrī-Shirāzī began to receive better treatment from the prison guards and later learned that the night of his dream, Khomeini
To offer a more recent example, in June 2009, prominent cleric Ayatollah Abū al-Qāsim Khazʿalī, a former member of the same powerful Guardian Council, told his son, Mahdī Khazʿalī, that he received a letter from “the Sacred Precinct” of the Hidden Imam commissioning him to defend Maḥmūd Aḥmadinīzhād in the controversial 2009 presidential election.623

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The intellectual history of Twelver Shiʿī Islam during the ghayba of the final Imam is a history of attempts to deal with the abrupt loss of the divine guide. It is a history of both attempts to rationalize why he does not reappear and paradoxically, of attempts to exploit his absence and the requisite intellectual space it has created for the ulama to ensure the tradition’s survival. Let us recall that unlike the Imams who preceded him – and distinct from some of the central figures of other religious traditions who appear in dreams to their followers – the Twelfth

had prayed to the Hidden Imam for his protection, *idem*, 73-4. Another cleric, a certain Shaykh Māzandariyān who did not trust Khomeini and refused to attend his classes in Qum dreamt of the Hidden Imam whispering things to Khomeini and remarked that they were the same height. He awoke with a realization of the station of Khomeini in the eyes of the Hidden Imam, *idem*, 75-8. Yet another reports speaks of Khomeini disappearing and reappearing again like the Hidden Imam, *idem*, 55. The recordings of Khomeini’s talks that were smuggled into Iran during his exile by his “representatives” and circulated among people can likewise be compared to the *tawqīʿāt* of the Hidden Imam from the Lesser Occultation.
Imam is believed by his partisans to be alive in every sense of the word: he is substantively, spiritually and physically present in the world; present and yet concealed. A person reading the above anecdotes from recent Iranian history might assume that the Shi'a have always maintained that their Imam has been in direct contact with certain of his leading votaries, in particular from among the ulama, throughout the ghayba. This dissertation has hopefully made a small contribution to rethinking this and other suppositions, exploring the invention of a tradition, and contributing to a better understanding of the role of the Hidden Imam in the history of Islamic thought. Let us conclude by reviewing the major findings of this work:

In the foregoing pages, we have attempted to elucidate the development of the question of encountering the Imam in the Greater Occultation, focusing primarily, though not solely, on the first three and a half centuries of this period. By way of background, we began our study by examining the works of hadith and tafsir that have survived from the period that came to be known as the Lesser Occultation (or shortly thereafter), exploring their implications for the doctrine of ghayba and the question of contacting the Hidden Imam. Here, we isolated,

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624 I am alluding here to Hobsbawm’s influential thesis that many of what communities call ancient ‘traditions’ are more often than not quite recent in origin. See Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions.”
contextualized and analyzed the hadiths that concern this issue. It was shown that the overwhelming majority of the hadiths affirm that not even his closest followers can see the Imam during his ghayba, while a small number suggest that he can be seen but never recognized.

In the next chapter, we focused exclusively on three hadiths adduced by Shi‘ī scholars as traditional proofs to lend credence to their position that some believers can in fact see and recognize the Imam during the Greater Occultation, thus justifying scripturally the stories of those who have met him. Our most important finding was that all three hadiths appear to have emanated from the Wāqifī followers of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and were later absorbed into Twlever sources and brought into line with fledgling dogmas about the ghayba of the twelfth Imam. Our investigation focused on the semantic multivalency of the word mawlā in two of these hadiths. We suggested that although a number of interpretations are plausible, evidence is stacked in favor of either client or servant as the primary (though not only) connotation of the word in these hadiths, with the latter being the preferred gloss of most Shi‘ī scholars.

In the following chapter, we demonstrated the shift in position between naql-oriented scholars who argued that the door to the Hidden Imam was closed practically in perpetuum and the ‘aqīl-oriented scholars that followed who moved the issue of contacting and seeing the Imam
from the realm of the *non possumus* to the realm of the theoretically possible. The most important text that reflects the position of the former is the final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam declaring anyone who claims to see him before the end of time “a lying impostor.” The significance of the Imam’s last putative letter can scarcely be overemphasized but surprisingly it has not received the attention it deserves from scholars. We argued that the decision to disallow any possibility of seeing the Imam in a wakeful state was a reflection of existing historical and political exigencies, arguing that it is difficult if not impossible to discern in the writings of the Twelver Shiʿī scholars from this period an implicit if not at times explicit dialogue with the rival Ismāʿīlī Shiʿa who posed the greatest political and military challenge to the Buyid confederacy. The decision to sunder all contact with the Imam during and introduce the notion of a second *ghayba* was made as Twelver Shiʿī scholars framed the nascent Twelver Shiʿī community as a non-Ismāʿīlī and politically non-threatening alternative to Shiʿī Islam.

The door that the final *tawqīʿ* sought to close was partially opened by the rationalist-leaning scholars who followed. Through interrogating the nuances of their philosophical and theological speculations vis-à-vis the *ghayba*, we explored how the act of permitting the possibility of encounters with the Imam on the part of the rationalist scholars may have served both a discursive and an apologetic function. Our findings, moreover, challenged the work of
earlier researchers who have tended to assume that stories of encounters with the Imam in a wakeful state were transmitted even in the first century of the Greater Occultation. It was shown that none of the scholars from this period, even those who permitted the possibility of some to see the Imam, transmit any accounts of anyone who has in fact seen him in person while awake.

In the final chapter, we presented the earliest accounts of encounters with the Imam from the Greater Occultation, foreshadowed as they were by rationalist scholars of the previous chapter. Though they appear some two centuries after the start of the Greater Occultation, these accounts are said to have occurred in the first decades of the Greater Occultation in what may be construed as an attempt to portray the Greater Occultation as a natural and uncomplicated extension of the Lesser Occultation. We discovered that the accounts were quite rare at this stage. It was only later during the Safavid and Qajar periods that the number of accounts rose exponentially, the stories became more embellished and the Imam was in effect transformed from being primarily a miracle worker to a doctrinal and legal teacher of the ulama, buttressing their newly defined station as his “general representatives.”

It is hoped that through the analysis offered in this dissertation, we have taken a modest but important step towards understanding the *Sitz im Leben* of some of the accounts, the
significance of the question of encountering the Imam and what it teaches us about the nature and dynamic of authority in Shi’i Islam in light of its doctrinal modalities.
Appendix: Compilations of Encounter Stories

What follows is an annotated bibliography of the compilations of accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam and other key works that emphasize such stories mentioned by Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī (d. 1389/1970) in his comprehensive bibliography of Shi‘ī works, *al-Dhari‘a ilā taṣānif al-shī‘a*:

*al-‘Abqarī al-hisān fi ahwāl (var., tawārīkh) šāhib al-zamān* [The peerless chief of the doers of good concerning the circumstances (var., chronicles) of the lord of the [final] age] (Persian) by ʿAlī-Akbar al-Nahāwandī (b. 1280/1863-4, d. 19 Rabī‘ al-Thānī 1369/1950), a student of Nūrī (d. 1320/1902). Only the first section of the second volume of this five volume work, called *al-Yāqūt al-ahmar fīman ra‘ā al-ḥujja al-muntaẓar*, [The red ruby concerning those who have


seen the eagerly awaited Proof (of God)] dealing with contact with the Hidden Imam has been published. In the recent edition, the book is composed of seven chapters: 1) Encounters with the Hidden Imam, in a wakeful state, during which the person has seen and simultaneously recognized the Imam (80 accounts); 2) Encounters with the Hidden Imam, in a wakeful state, during which the person sees the Imam but only later realizes this fact (109 accounts); 3) *Mushāhadāt va mukāshafāt* [sightnings and unveilings] concerning people who saw the Imam in a state between wakefulness and sleep (16 accounts; 4) Veridical dreams (29 accounts); 5) Vestiges of the Hidden Imam concerning accounts of those who saw the light of the Imam, heard his voice, or inhaled his fragrance. This chapter also includes the *tawqīʿāt* of the Imam and accounts of miracles performed by him (52 accounts); 6) Accounts of those who prayed to the Hidden Imam to intercede for them (*tavassulāt*) and whose prayers were answered (19 accounts); 7) Accounts of those who met the servants, the four representatives (*sufārā*) or deputies (*wukalā*) of the Imam (47 accounts – all from the Lesser Occultation).

The book’s editor, Sayyid Javād Muʿallim, maintains that there are so many stories of people who have seen the Imam that the matter is no longer in need of being proven.\(^{628}\) He stresses that anyone can see the Imam irrespective of his learning or piety, despite the fact that

\(^{628}\) Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥadrat-i vali-i ʿaṣr*, 13 (from the intro. by Muʿallim).
most of the stories deal with scholars and students of knowledge. According to Mu‘allim, the accounts serve to prove that the Imam “truly is among us” (ān ḥaḍrat vāqi‘an dar bayn-i mā hastand). Stories of prominent ulama encountering the Imam are included throughout the work though a source is never cited for any of the accounts. A report is also related of the author’s scribe, a certain Muḥammad-‘Ali Ḥā’iri, seeing the Hidden Imam.

**Badāʾiʿ al-kalām fīman fāza bi-liqāʾ al-imām ‘alayh al-salām** [Wondrous words concerning those who attained the presence of the Imam] (Arabic?) by Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Murtaḍā al-Yazdī al-Ḥā’iri al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī (d. ca. 1313/1895-6). According to al-Ṭihrānī, the author mentioned this book in a list of his works published at the end of his...

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631 E.g., Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (pp. 366-9); Muqaddas al-Ardabili (72); ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (176-7, 179-80); al-Shahīd al-Thānī (179); al-Ḥurr al-ʿAmili (360); Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī (177-8); Aqā Najafī Isfahānī (178-9); ‘Alī al-Ḥā’iri al-Yazdī (192-3).


Akhbār al-awā’il, published in 1312/1894-5. According to al-Amīnī, a section of this work was published in Bombay in 1308/1890-1 and featured an exordium (taqrīz) by Nūrī.

Bahjat al-awliyā’ fīman fāza bi-liqā’ al-ḥujja [The delight of the friends of God concerning those who attained the presence of the Proof (of God)] (Persian) by Muḥammad Taqī b. Mīrzā Kāẓim b. Mīrzā ‘Azīz Allāh b. al-Mawlā Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī al-Iṣfahānī, known as al-Almāsī (b. 1089/1678-9, d. 1159/1746-7), a maternal grandson of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī. According to al-Ṭihrānī, this work was mentioned in the work of one of al-Almāsī’s students. It has never been published and no manuscripts are known to exist.

634 Al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīʿa, 3:65 (no. 190).
635 Al-Amīn, Aʿyān al-Shīʿa, 9:254
636 Nūrī, Najm-i thāqīb, 415.
637 Al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīʿa, 3:160 (no. 567). Al-Qazwīnī, al-Imām al-mahdī min al-mahd ilā al-zuhūr, 254, lists the title of the book as al-Bahja fīman fāza bi-liqā’ al-ḥujja. An account from this work about an unnamed believer from Baghdād (alive in 1136/1723-4) stranded on an island who sees a giant snake killed by a rabbit, encounters a group of people and realizes after being transported back to his home that one of them was the Hidden Imam is recorded by the prominent compiler of encounter stories, Mīrzā Ḥusayn Nūrī (d. 1320/1902) via Nūr al-ʿuyūn, a work written by one of al-Almāsī’s students, suggesting that Nūrī himself did not have access to the book, al-Nūrī, Jannat al-maʿwā, 108-10 (no. 45) [Persian translation: Nūrī, Najm-i thāqīb, 415-7 (no. 38)]; al-Hāʾirī al-Yazdī, Ilzām al-nāṣib, 2:41-2 (no. 26), who gives the title of the book as Bahjat al-awliyā’ fī dhikr man raʾāhu fī al-ghayba al-kubrā.
Bughayt al-ṭālib fīman raʿā al-imām al-ghāʾib ʿalayh al-salām [The object of the seeker’s desire concerning those who have seen the Hidden Imam] (Persian) by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Birjandi al-Qāʾinī (b. 1276/1859-60, d. 1352/1933-4). This work was printed in Mashhad in 1342/1923-4. According to Mahdīpūr, this initial printing was 185 pages and a copy of the work in the handwriting of the author is available in the library of Ayatollah Marʿashi-Najafī (in Qum). Another manuscript exists presumably in the same library under the title Tadhkirat al-ṭālib. The author was a student of Mīrzā-yi Shīrāzī and Nūrī among others. According to al-Ṭihrānī, this work mentions or makes uses of an anti-Bābī polemic call al-Radd ʿalā al-bābīyya (about which nothing more is known) by Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Khūsufī al-Qāʾinī, another student of Mīrzā-yi Shīrāzī.

Dār al-salām fī man ἅza bi-salām al-Imām [The abode of peace concerning those who attained the peace of the Imam] (Persian) by Maḥmūd b. Jaʿfar al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī (known as ʿIrāqī-  

638 Al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīʿa, 3:133 (no. 449).
639 Mahdīpūr, Kitāb-nāmah-yi ḥaḍrat-i mahdī, 1:175 (no. 398).
640 Al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīʿa, 10:189 (no. 453).
Maythamī) (b. 1240/1825 in Tehran; d. 1306/1888-9, 1308/1890-1 or 1310/1892-3 in Najaf). The author is often referred to in Shi‘i biographical sources as “Ṣāḥib-i Dār al-Salām” (the Author of Dār al-salām). Completed by ‘Irāqī-Maythamī in 1301/1884, Dār al-salām was published two years later in lithograph form in Tehran by the official state printing house with the blessing of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah and the imperial court and a generous initial printing of 1,000 copies. It was first typeset in Tehran in 1333AS/1954. Recently, an abridged form of the book has been published under the title Ru‘yā-yi nūr [Visions of the Light] and the monograph itself has been repeatedly published, most recently in 2008 by the prolific press of the Jamkarān Mosque outside Qum. In recent printings, the title of the book appears as Dār al-salām dar aḥvālāt-i ḥaḍrat-i mahdī va ‘alā’im-i zuhūr va kisānī kih dar khwāb yā bidāri bih maḥḍar-i ān ḥaḍrat-i mubārak sharafyāb shudih-and [The abode of peace concerning the Mahdi, the portents of his advent, and [the accounts of] those who were honored to attain his presence in dreams or

641 On this work, see al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dhari‘a, 8:20-1 (no. 18); Mahdavī, Zindigīnāmah-yi ʿAllāmah Majlisī, 2:284. An 1886 lithograph copy of the book is available at Princeton University (call number: 2465.4985.328q) under the title Dār al-salām al-mushtamil ʿalā dhikr man fāza bi-salām (344 fols.).

642 On the author, see al-Amin, Aʿyān al-Shīʿa, 10:103; Ghaemmaghami, “The Abode of Peace: Maḥmūd b. Jaʿfar Maythamī (d. 1310/1893) and the Phenomenon of Encounters with the Hidden Imam.”


644 ʿIrāqī-Maythamī, Dār al-salām'.
while awake]. Many of the stories recounted in *Dār al-salām* are reproduced in virtually all subsequent books that take up the theme of encounters with the Imam.

*Dār al-salām* is composed of 6 parts. The first three are short and devoted to restating popular apologetic themes in *ghayba* works such as rationalizing the need for an infallible guide in every age. Parts 5 and 6 are the largest sections of the book, entitled: “The possibility of seeing the Imam during the *ghayba*.” In the beginning of this section, ʿIrāqī-Maythamī provides a Persian translation of two accounts: the story of the Green Island in the White Sea and the story of five islands ruled by sons of the Hidden Imam.645 He divides the remaining accounts between those who saw the Imam while awake and those who saw him in dreams and visions.646 In the category of those who saw the Imam while awake, he introduces a further taxonomy of those who recognized the Imam while seeing him and those who recognized him after having seen him. The accounts in this section are mainly of eminent ulama from the Safavid and Qajar periods such as al-Ardabili and Baḥr al-ʿUlūm Ṭabāṭabāʾī. In addition, ʿIrāqī-Maythamī is the first person to provide a now famous account of his teacher, Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī, having encountered the Hidden Imam in Najaf (see chapter 4 of this dissertation). This

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account has been repeated in virtually all subsequent biographical works on al-Anṣārī and strengthened his reputation as a pious jurist who enjoyed near access to the Hidden Imam. Perhaps most significant of all, ʿIrāqī-Maythamī provides two accounts of himself having encountered the Imam. In one report, he looks back at a time when he was deeply disturbed by a number of ulama who had strayed from the path of the Imams (munḥarif shudand) and died clinging to corrupt beliefs (ʿaqāʾid-i fāsidah) – a reference to ulama, branded as heretics by ʿIrāqī-Maythamī, who became inclined to the Shaykhī school and the Bābī religion, including at least one of ʿIrāqī-Maythamī’s colleagues from his time as a student of al-Anṣārī.647 Troubled by this trend, he claimed to have experienced a vision of the Hidden Imam one night in a mosque in Najaf. As the Imam was leaving the mosque, ʿIrāqī-Maythamī threw himself at his feet weeping. He begged to know: “What will happen to me?” The Imam gently helped him to his feet and responded in Persian: “I won’t leave without you (bī-tū nimīravam).” ʿIrāqī-Maythamī interpretation of this dream is worth noting. He understands the Imam’s words to

mean that the he will not enter Paradise without ʿIrāqi-Maythami, perhaps suggesting that ʿIrāqi-Maythami will live to witness the Imam’s appearance before dying with him.648

**Hidāyat al-anām fīman laqiya al-ḥujja fī al-manām** [Guidance to humanity concerning those who met the Proof (of God) in dreams] (Persian) by Ḥusayn b. Naṣr Allāh b. Ṣādiq al-Mūsawī al-Ḥusaynī al-ʿArab Bāghī al-Urūmī or Ḥusayn Urūmiyyah-ī, known as ʿArab Bāghī. According to al-Ṭihrānī, this work was completed on 6 May 1913 and printed in Tabriz the following year. It is composed of 183 pages and includes 40 accounts of dreams and visions of the Hidden Imam.649 Al-Ṭihrānī notes that this work was appended to al-Urūmī’s *al-Tuḥfā al-mahdawīyya fī aḥwāl al-imām al-mahdī* which was completed in 1330/1911-2 and printed in Tabriz in 1335/1916-7.650 No copies are known to exist in Europe or North America.


650 Al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, 25:174 (no. 114); 3:475 (no. 1748), where al-Ṭihrānī calls the book, *al-Tuḥfā al-mahdīyya*. Of the work’s twelve chapters, chapter eleven includes accounts of 40 individuals who encountered the Hidden Imam (*fāzū bi-ziyāratihī*).
Jannat al-maʾwā fī dhikr man fāza bi-liqāʾ al-ḥujja aw muʿjazāthi fī al-ghayba al-kubrā (Arabic) [The garden of refuge concerning those who attained the presence of the Proof (of God or witnessed) his miracles during the greater occultation], by Nūrī (d. 1320/1902), completed on 13 Shawwāl 1302/26 July 1885.651 This work includes 59 accounts not mentioned by al-Majlīsī in his Biḥār al-anwār.652 Nūrī in fact hoped that his work would serve as an addendum to the volume of Biḥār al-anwār that is devoted to the Hidden Imam in order to “prove (the) weighty matter” of the Imam’s appearance, from time to time, to meet with his most pious disciples.” He prayed that these stories could serve “as a means [for the faithful] to draw closer to (the Imam).”653

651 See al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīʿa, 5:159-60 (no. 675). The most comprehensive biography of Nūrī by Yāsin al-Mūsawī is found in al-Nūrī, al-Najm-i ṭāqīb fī aḥwāl al-imām al-ḥujja al-ghāʾib (trans. al-Mūsawī), 1: 5–112. The best available biography in a Western language is found in Brunner, Die Schia und die Koranfälschung, 39–42.

652 On this work, see E. Kohlberg, “Behar al-Anwar,” in Elr, 4:90-3.

**Kashf al-ḥaqq (Arbaʿīn-i Khātūnābādī)** [Unveiling the truth (forty hadiths collected by Khātūnābādī)] (Persian). The author, Mīr Muḥammad Ṣādiq b. al-Mīr Muḥammad Riḍā al-Khātūnābādī al-Īṣfahānī (b. 1207/1792-3, d. Rajab 1272/1856), from the well-known Khātūnābād family of scholars, was a prominent scholar and Imam Jumʿa in Isfahan for 32 years. The work was written after a debate with the young Mīrzā ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī (known as the Bāb) at the home of the governor of Isfahan, Muʿtamid al-Dawlah Manūchihr Khān (d. 1263/1847), and in the presence of many eminent ulama from Isfahan. According to the publisher, the work was written “both to benefit the elite (*khāvāṣṣ*, i.e., the educated) and to prevent the general public (*ʿavāmm-i mardum*) from falling blindly into the well of waywardness and misguidedness (*chāh-i ḍalālat va ghavāyat*) and instead recognize the [true] Guardian of the Age and the Proof (of God) for our time [i.e., the Hidden Imam].” Although Khātūnābādī never mentions the Bāb by name, he explains in the introduction that he is writings this treatise “to guide the confused and the deviant” (*dar hidāyat-i mutashavvishīn va munḥaratīn*). He bemoans the fact that “some of the ignorant who believe themselves to be

654 On this work, see al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, 18:32 (no. 537).

655 He should not be mistaken with the more well-known Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad Khātūnābādī (d. 1291/1874-5) who was one of the scholars that issued a fatwa against the British when British forces occupied the port of Būshihr in 1273/1856-7. On the latter, see Rajabi, *ʿUlamā-yi mujāhid*, 184.
learned” have obfuscated matters about the Imam, confused and perturbed the masses, and led them to stray away from the path of the Imam and adopt corrupt beliefs. To prove the Imam’s existence, Khātūnābādī mentions several stories of those who have seen him.

Kifāyat al-muhtadī fi maʿrifat al-mahdī ʿalayh al-salām [That which suffices the rightly guided in knowing/recognizing the Mahdi, peace be upon him] (Persian) by Muḥammad Hādī ibn Muḥammad Mir Lawḥi Sabzavārī (fl. 11th/17th cent). This important work was only recently published for the first time in 1384AS/2005-6. The following year, an Arabic translation was published in Najaf. Also known as Arbaʿīn-i Mir Lawḥi, it is a Persian

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656 Khātūnābādī, Kashf al-ḥaqq, 5.

657 Khātūnābādī, Kashf al-ḥaqq, 9. In contrast, Bābī and Bahāʾī sources speak favorably of Khātūnābādī. He served as the Bāb’s host in Iṣfahān for forty days. See Balyuzi, The Báb, 113; Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal, 257. Moreover, when some seventy prominent ulama condemned the Bāb as a heretic and issued his death sentence, Khātūnābādī declined to endorse their verdict. See [Zarandī], The Dawn-Breakers (trans. Shoghi Effendi), 209.

658 Khātūnābādī, Kashf al-ḥaqq, 67-80, 85-94.


660 Sabzavārī, Kifāyat al-muhtadī.

661 Al-Iṣfahānī, Mukhtaṣar kifāyat al-muhtadī.

662 Iṣfahānī, Introduction to Sabzavārī, Kifāyat al-muhtadī, 112.
translation and commentary of forty hadiths on the twelfth Imam, 25 of which are transmitted from *Ithbāt al-rajʿa*, a work ascribed to Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nishābūrī (d. 260/873). In the introduction, Mīr-Lawḥī states that he began writing *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* after seeing a dream of either the Prophet or the Imam on 14 Shaʿbān 1081/27 December 1670. The book was completed two years later. The chapter on hadith no. 37 (a hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq which says that all the miracles where were performed by the Prophets and their successors (*al-*awsiyāʾ) will also be performed by the Qāʾîm) is the longest chapter of the work on the theme of encounters with the Imam and miracles performed by him.

On encounters during the Greater Occultation, in particular, Mīr Lawḥī states, “There have been many Shiʿa and mawālī who have attained his presence during the Greater Occultation.” He refers readers to the three works we have discussed in this dissertation (al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn*, al-Rāwandī’s *al-Kharāʾij*, and al-Irbili’s *Kashf al-ghumma*) as well as the

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664 Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 427. The text is ambiguous about whether he saw the Prophet or the Hidden Imam though it is likely the latter considering that the dream took place on the eve of the Imam’s putative birth.

Regarding the final tawqīʿ of the Imam, he states simply, “What has been mentioned in the hadith, ‘And whoever claims to have seen (me) before the appearance of al-Sufyānī and the Cry is a liar,’ does not contradict these accounts (bā in akhbār munāfīt nadārad).” Mīr Lawḥī directs readers to his work, Riyāḍ al-muʾminīn, for a more detailed explanation of the issue. In this chapter, Mīr-Lawḥī states that an unnamed Shiʿi scholar has stated in a work on the virtues of the Imams that there are so many stories of the Hidden Imam meeting his followers, healing the sick and succoring the helpless that were they all to be collected, it would be a great book (kitābī ʿazīm mishavad). He then cites two such accounts from this unnamed author transmitted from al-Irbili’s Kashf al-ghumma: the story of Ismāʿīl al-

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666 Sabzavārī, Kifāyat al-muhtadī, 585-641.

667 This is a reference to al-Fuṣūl al-muhimma l-maʿrifat al-aʾimma al-ithnī ṣ-ḥar wa-faḍlīhim wa-maʿrifat awlādihim wa-naslihim by al-Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Ṣabbāgh al-Mālikī al-Makki (d. 855/1451-2), a Sunnī scholar from the Maghrib whose testimony in support of the Twelfth Imam being the Mahdī is referred to often by Shiʿi apologists. See Madelung, “al-Mahdī,” EI². On al-Fuṣūl al-muhimma, see al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dhariʾa, 16:246 (no. 978). This work has been published but there are no accounts of encounters during the Greater Occultation mentioned in the chapter on the twelfth Imam (Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, al-Fuṣūl al-muhimma, 2:1095-1136).

668 The full title of this work is Riyāḍ al-muʾminīn wa-hadāʾiq al-muttaqīn, but it does not appear to have survived. See Sharīʿat–Mūsawī Iṣfahānī, introduction to Sabzavārī, Kifāyat al-muhtadī, 106-12; al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dhariʾa, 11:329 (no. 2011). According to Hairi, Mīr-Lawḥī wrote this work in his youth. Hairi, “Mir Lawḥī, EI².

669 Sabzavārī, Kifāyat al-muhtadī, 628.
Hirqili and the account of the father of a certain al-Bāqī b. ʿĀṭwa al-ʿAlawi al-Ḥusaynī.\textsuperscript{670} The only other Greater Occultation account cited in this chapter is the story of youth and the Black Stone (see above, chapter 4 for this account).\textsuperscript{671} Mīr-Lawḥī adds, “I know a sick person who has seen the Imam repeatedly (mukarrar ān ḥadrat rā didah). At one point, he suffered from a terminal illness but the Imam cured him completely.”\textsuperscript{672} Mīr-Lawḥī next refers to the hadith that the Imam attends the pilgrimage each year where the people see him but are unable to recognize him. It appears that he understands this hadith as applying to the Greater Occultation as well. He also cites the story of Fāris al-Adīb (see above, chapter 3 for this account) though he does not opine whether this account is from the Lesser or Greater Occultation. With the exception of the three accounts referred to above, all of the remaining accounts mentioned in this chapter are from the Lesser Occultation. It is thus odd to see Mīr-Lawḥī mention at this point that “most of the stories that have been mentioned took place during the Greater Occultation (va ḥikāyāti kih madhkūr shud akthar dar ghaybat-i kubrā būd).”\textsuperscript{673}

\textsuperscript{670} Sabzavārī, \textit{Kitāyat al-muhtadī}, 629-34.

\textsuperscript{671} Sabzavārī, \textit{Kitāyat al-muhtadī}, 625-7.

\textsuperscript{672} Sabzavārī, \textit{Kitāyat al-muhtadī}, 634.

\textsuperscript{673} Sabzavārī, \textit{Kitāyat al-muhtadī}, 637.
al-Najm al-thāqib fi aḥwāl al-imām al-ghā‘ib [The Piercing Star concerning the Circumstances of the Hidden Imam] (Persian), by Nūrī, completed shortly after Jannat al-ma‘wā on 14 Dhū al-Qa‘da 1302/25 August 1885. Featuring one hundred stories about contact with the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation, al-Najm al-thāqib is Nūrī’s magnum opus on the Hidden Imam and the most frequently published of his writings. According to al-Nūrī, his master, Mīrzā-yi Shīrāzī, urged him to write al-Najm al-thāqib, stamping his seal of approval on the manuscript and asserting that no other work on the Hidden Imam rivals it. Nūrī maintains that “the main purpose of recording these stories is to prove the blessed existence of the Imam, [demonstrate] that he lives among the people, and [show] how his existence benefits them.” That the work was written in Persian betrays a desire on the part of Nūrī (and/or Shīrāzī) to make the stories available to the educated public in Nūrī’s native land. This work has been translated into Arabic twice.


675 Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 2; al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīʿa, 24:69.

676 Nūrī, Najm-i thāqib, 574.
Tabṣirat al-walī fīman raʿā al-qāʾim al-mahdī (Arabic) by Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Bāḥrānī (d. 1107/1695-96 or 1109/1697-98). Completed in 1099/1688, this work contains 67 accounts of encounters with the Imam, most of which are from the Lesser Occultation. Al-Bāḥrānī states in the introduction that it “occurred to [him]” (khaṭara bi-bālī) to compile the reports of those who had seen or hear the Imam’s voice during the lifetime of his father, Ḥasan al-ʿAskārī and then during “the first and second occultation,” adding that there are numerous (kathīr) such accounts “in dependable books and reliable works” (fi al-kutub al-muʿtamada wa-l-āthār al-musnada).  

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678 Al-Baḥrānī, Tabṣirat al-walī fīman raʿā al-qāʾim al-mahdī. The comment by al-Ṭihrānī, al-Dharīʿa, 3:326 (no. 1192), repeated by Madelung, “Baḥrānī, Hāšem,” Elr, 3:529, that the work includes accounts of “about 76 persons who saw the Twelfth Imam down to the year 664/1265-66” (al-Ṭihrānī; Madelung,) is incorrect since he includes the story of the Green Island in the White Sea which is clearly much later. For information about manuscripts, abridgements and translations, see Tabriziyan, al-ʿAllāma al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Baḥrānī, 111-4.

679 Al-Baḥrānī, Tabṣirat al-walī, 4.
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Kamarahʾī, Mīrzā Khalīl al-. Davāzdahumīn imām va falsafah-yi ghabat-i Mahdī. [Tehran]: ʿAbbās Kasāʾī Ardistānī (Chāpkhānah-yi Ḥaydarī), n.d.


Kashshi, Abū ʿAmr Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-. *Rījāl al-Kashshī* [see under al-Ṭūsī].

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