

THE SHIAH DOCTRINE OF THE IMAMATE

The expression, "the Shi'ahs," signifies companions or followers, and its reference in legal and theological terminology, ancient and modern, is to the partisans of 'Ali and his sons. They are agreed in the assertion that the Imamate is not an ordinary matter, to be left to be determined by an assembly of the people, but the Imamate is a pillar of the faith, in fact the very foundation of Islam. It is not regarded as permissible to think that the prophet could have been unmindful of it, or that he would have left it to the people to determine. It was necessary rather for him to appoint the Imam for the people, that the Imam himself should be without sin, great or small, and that 'Ali was indeed the one whom Mohammed designated. Their opinions they base on statements which they have received by the authority of traditions, and to these traditions they give meanings which are in accord with their doctrines. Many of these traditions are not recognized by those who follow the *Sunna*, who know good money from bad, nor by the writers of Law. For the most part they are statements that are ambiguous, or that are uncertain in their transmission, or that are essentially different in their meaning from the Shi'ite interpretations of them.

These statements they are accustomed to divide into two classes, the Clear and the Concealed. An example of the Clear declarations is found in the words of the Prophet, "He to whom I am Master, 'Ali is also his Master." This they take to mean that the right of Master or Lord in Islam belongs to 'Ali. 'Omar therefore

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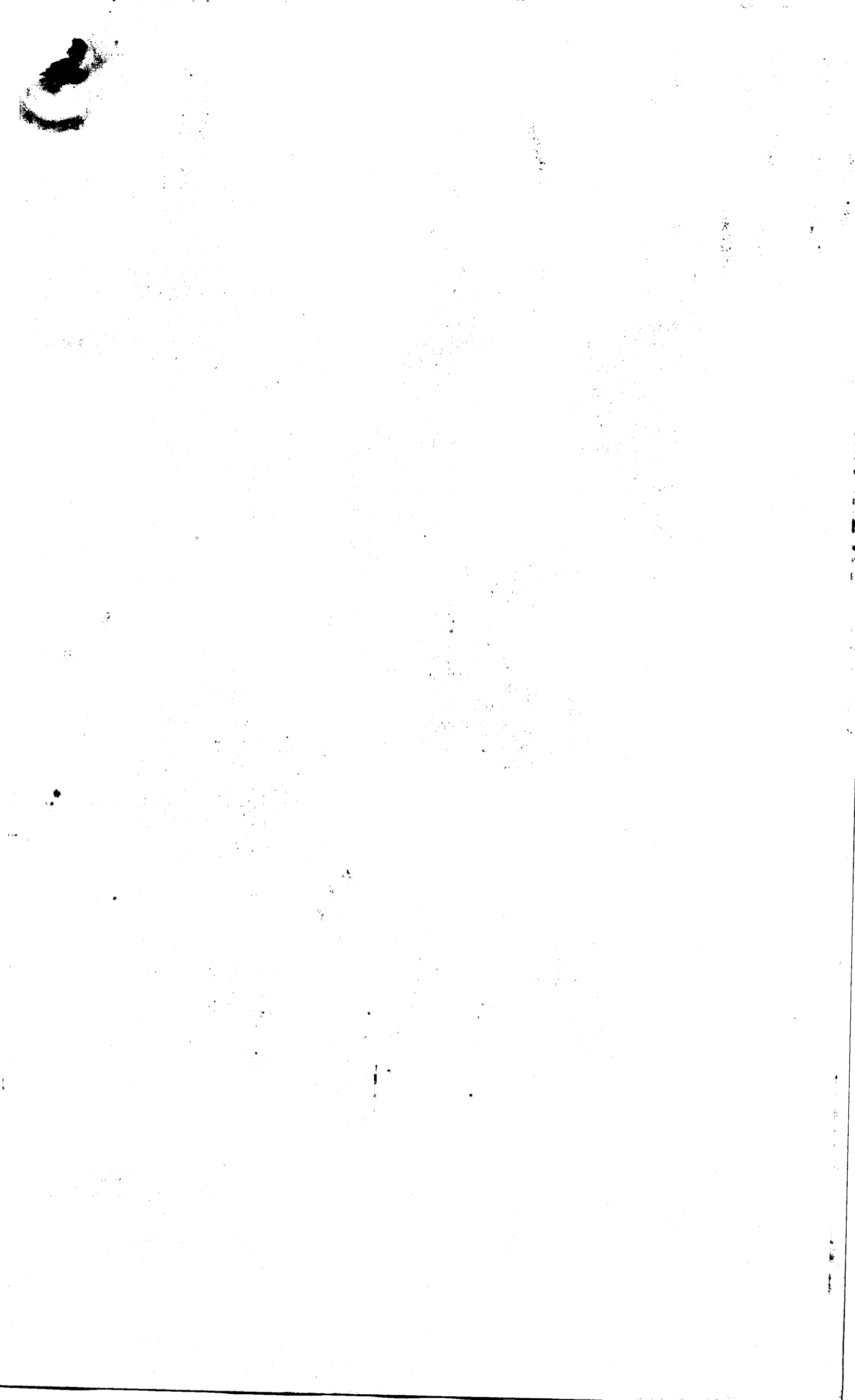
said to him (derisively), "So you have the mastery of all the Moslems, both men and women!"

Another saying of the Prophet, "The best judge between you is 'Ali," they say means that the Imamate has no other significance than this, namely, the right of judging according to the commands of God. The same idea is expressed again in these words, "invested with authority," which they find revealed in the command, (Koran, 66, Rodwell), "O ye who believe! obey God and the Apostle and those among you invested with authority." This authority is the right to judge and to decide. And they say that in the deliberation of the *Sajdah*, in order to determine the question of the Imamate, 'Ali was the one who could bring about a decision. Others also another of their texts, "Whoever pledges loyalty to me, even at the risk of his life, will be my representative, charged to exercise authority after me, if no one else took such a pledge of loyalty except 'Ali."

Here is an example of the class of statements where the sense is Concealed. They say that when the Prophet had received the Sura of Immunity (Koran ix) during the pilgrimage at Mecca, he first commanded Abu Bakr to explain it (to the Arab idolaters), when he received a further revelation to assign the duty of delivering this message to some one of his own family. It was in compliance with this command that he commissioned 'Ali to take this Sura and to recite it to them. This indicates, they say, that 'Ali had obtained the preferred right. They point out in addition to this that the Prophet is not known to have placed anyone over 'Ali in command, whereas he did place 'Usama ibn Zaid over Abu Bakr and 'Omar on one expedition, and 'Amru ibn al-'Aas over them at another time. They consider that all of these things go to prove that 'Ali and no other was intended for the Caliphate. Some of their proof texts,

1 (Translated from Ibn Khaldun, Prolegomena, in *Essays des Manuscrits de la Bibliothéque Impériale*, Arabic Text, vol. xvi, Part II, p. 266) Translations, vol. xix,

2 According to the orthodox account 'Ali was sick, this day in the house of Fatima and did not assist in the discussion which...



however, are unknown (to orthodox Moslems) and others are far from being subject to the interpretations they put upon them. There are some of the Shi'ahs who consider that these texts point to 'Ali definitely and personally, and that they also indicate the right of his successors. Those who hold this opinion are called the *Imami*, and they reject the two Shaikhs (Abu Bakr and 'Omar) because they did not acknowledge the supreme command of 'Ali, and did not give allegiance to him as these texts required. They have therefore scoffed at Abu Bakr and 'Omar in their office as caliphs. But we will not pay any attention to the way in which some of the more bigoted of their party have slandered these two Caliphs, for the Shi'ahs, as well as we, have already refuted these accusations. Another group among them say that these texts indicate that the appointment of 'Ali was required on account of his unique qualification and not on mere personal grounds. They claim that people fail in their purpose when they do not give the matter of qualification its rightful place. This group are known as the *Zaidis*. They do not reject the two Shaikhs and do not object to their caliphates (literally imamat), while they say that 'Ali was the better qualified. They held that an imamate that was based on the preference of the people was valid, even though one better qualified might have been available.

The Shi'ahs are not agreed as to the succession of the Imamate (literally, caliphate) after 'Ali. There are those who maintain that the succession belonged to the children of Fatima, one after the other, by special designation (from 'Ali). We shall have more to say about this opinion later on. They are called *Imami*s because they taught as an article of faith the necessity of recognizing the Imam and his designation, which is the central principle in their beliefs. The other chief division of them accepted the succession of the children of Fatima, but subject to the choice of the Shi'ah community. They

brave. He must be ready to take up arms and establish his claim to the Imamate. These are the *Zaidis*, and they get their name from their leader, Zaid ibn 'Ali ibn al-Husain as-Sibt (the grandson). In a discussion with his brother Muhammad al-Baqir, Zaid held to the opinion that the Imam was obliged to justify his cause (if necessary) by the force of arms. Al-Baqir objected to this on the ground that on that principle their father, Zain al-'Abidin, would not have been an Imam, for he never took up arms to assert his rights, and did not attempt to do so. He went on to accuse Zaid reproachfully of having accepted doctrines of the *Mu'tazilites* from Wasil ibn 'Ata. The *Imami*s had had controversy with Zaid on the subject of the "Imamate" of the two Shaikhs, and as he declared that it was valid, and that he did not deny them the right to that office, they repudiated his authority and ceased to count him in the number of their imams. For this they were called the *Rafizah*, or the *Reputiators*, (Cf. Friedlander, *Journal American Oriental Society*, vol. xxix, p. 140 ff.).

Others considered that the Imamate passed from 'Ali to one or the other of his sons, the two grandsons (of the Prophet). But they were not in entire agreement about this, for some considered that it belonged to Muhammad, the "son of the Hanafite woman," the half brother of Hasan and Husain, and that it should then follow the line of his children. This party were called the *Kaisanis*, but we will omit the disagreements among these people for the sake of brevity.

One group among them are called the *Ghulât*, or those who go beyond the bounds of reason or of faith in claiming the divinity of the Imam, saying either, "he is a man who has acquired the qualities of divinity," or, "he is an individual in whom divinity has been established." This belief corresponds to the Christian claim for Jesus. But the fact is that 'Ali "burned with fire" whoever made this assertion about him. And Muham-

angry with al-Mukhtar ibn Abu Ubaid for speaking to him in such a fashion, and cursed him and refused to have anything more to do with him. Ja'far as-Sadiq acted in the same way towards anyone who addressed him in that manner.

Some of them asserted that the Imam has a perfection that no one else can have, and that when he dies his spirit passes to the Imam succeeding him, who is then the possessor of this peculiar perfection. This is a doctrine of transmigration. Among the Ghulât there is one group who say that the Imamate ceased to be transmissible when it passed to the individual who was destined to be the last of the Imams. They are called the Waqifis, and some of them say that the last Imam is still alive; for he did not die, but is only concealed from the eyes of men. They undertake to prove this by reference to al-Khidr (Koran xviii; 64). The same claim is made in regard to 'Ali, with the added details that he is in the clouds, and the sound of the thunder is his voice and the lightning is his whip. The very same sort of thing, also, they say about Muhammad ibn Hanafiyah, and that he is in Mount Razwa in the land of the Hejaz. The poet Kuthayyir (723 A. D.) has written the following verses in this connection:

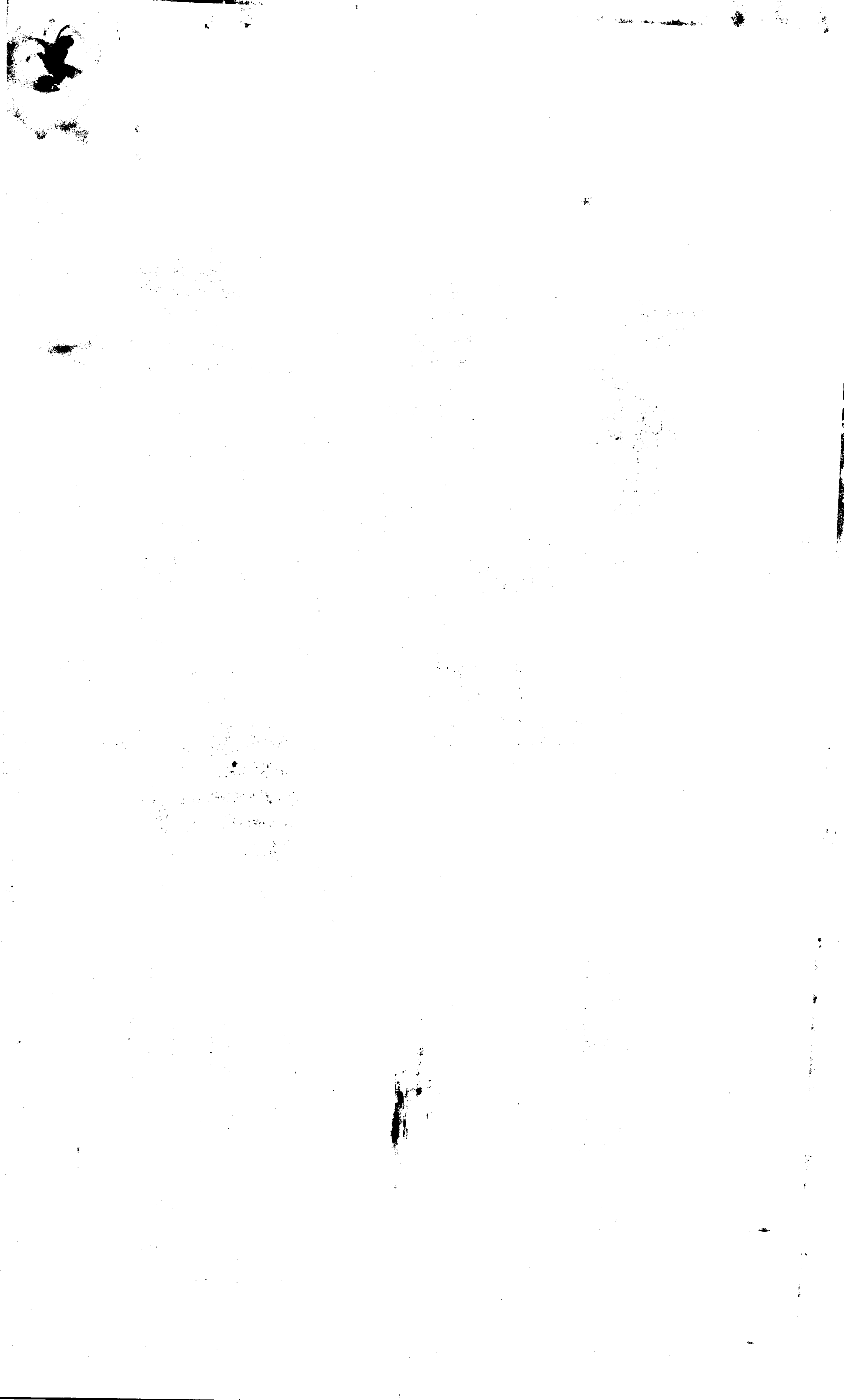
"Four complete are the Imams of the Quraysh, the lords of Right:
'Ali and his three good sons, each of them a shining light,
One was faithful and devout; Kerbala hid ore from sight;
One, until with waving flags his horsemen he shall lead to fight
Dwells in Mount Radwa, concealed; honey he drinks and water bright."

The Ghulât of the Imamis, and particularly the "Twelvers," hold this doctrine also, for they maintain that the twelfth of their Imams, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Askari, whom they call al-Mahdi, (the rightly guided), when imprisoned with his mother, entered a sort of well or pit in the house his family occupied at Hilla. There he disappeared, but he is to come forth at the end of the age to fill the earth with justice. In proof

of this they refer to a tradition which is found in the book of al-Tirmidhi in regard to the Mahdi. Even up to the present time they are confidently expecting him, and they call him *al-Muntazar*, the one they are waiting for. Every night after the evening prayer they stop at the gate in front of this well or pit. As they approach they call out his name and beseech him to return, until the stars come out. Then they disperse and come again the next night to repeat the same performance. This also they have kept up until the present time.

There are some of the Waqifis who say that the Imam who died will return to life in this world. They substantiate this claim by what they find in the Koran concerning the People of the Cave, (The Seven Sleepers, Koran xviii; 8); and concerning the "man who passed by a city," (Koran ii; 201); and concerning the Israelite who was murdered, whose corpse was struck with the bone of a cow that they were commanded to sacrifice, (Koran ii; 68; Cf. Numbers xix and Deut. xxi: 1-9), "The cow was to be sacrificed in order that a murderer might be discovered through the miracle to be wrought by a piece of her flesh," (Rodwell, op. cit.); and from other such references to extraordinary things that are like miracles, but which serve as proofs only in their proper connection. As-Sayyid Himyari, (Nashwan ibn Sa'id al-Himyari, d. 1177 A. D.), wrote verses about them. We have written enough about these Ghulât of the Imamis, for the teachers of the Shiah do not credit them, and have themselves pointed out the futility of proofs of this sort.

As for the Kaisanis, they considered that the Imamate passed from Muhammad ibn Hanafiyah to his son Abu Hashim. Hence they were also called the Hashimis. At this point there was division, for some of them held that after the death of Abu Hashim, the Imamate should pass to his brother 'Ali, and afterwards to 'Ali's son, al-Hasan. Another group maintained that before Abu



journey from Syria, he appointed Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, and that this Muhammad had designated his son Ibrahim, who was known as "the Imam"; and that Ibrahim had appointed his brother Abdullah ibn al-Harithiya, who was called as-Saffáh; and that he in turn had appointed his brother Abdullah, Abu Ja'far, who was called al-Mansur; and that so the Imamate passed in his line, by succession and by agreement, one after the other, to the last of them. This is the sect of the Hashimis who were supporters of the dynasty of the Beni 'Abbas.

Among them were Abu Muslim, Sulaiman ibn Kathir, Abu Salmat al-Khallál, and others. To have a better proof of the rights of the Abbasid dynasty, there were some of this sect who declared that the Imamate had come from al-'Abbas (the uncle of Mohammed), for they said that he had survived the Prophet and that he was the man best fitted for that office.

The Zaidis followed and interpreted the Imamate according to teachings of their own. They held that it was to be determined by the choice of the legal authorities (literally "the leaders in the loosing and the binding") and not by designation. To the imamate of 'Ali they agreed, as also to that of his son al-Hasan, and of al-Hasan's brother al-Husain, then of al-Husain's son, 'Ali Zain al-Abidin, and of his son Zaid ibn 'Ali. The latter was the leader of this sect.

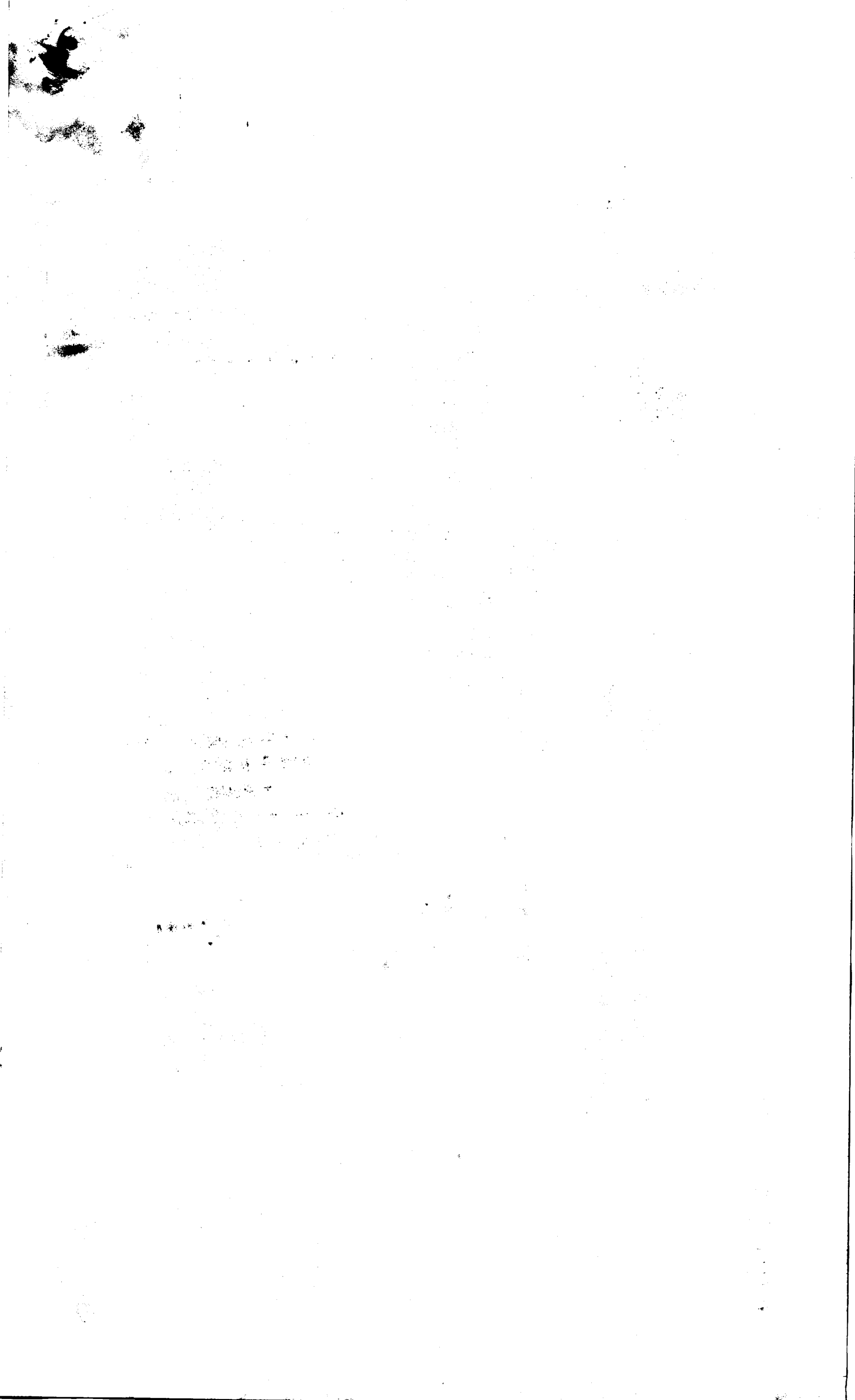
He took up arms at Kufa, declaring his claim to the Imamate. He was killed, however, and crucified at the Kunásat (a place for refuse near Kufa). The Zaidis then claimed the imamate for his son Yahyá, who went to Khorasan and was killed at al-Juzjan, after he had designated Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Hasan ibn al-Hasan the "grandson" (of the Prophet). He was called *An-Nafs az-Zakiyya*, "the Pure Soul." He took up arms in the Hejaz and assumed the title al-Mahdi. But the troops of al-Mansur came against him at once, and he was

his brother Ibrahim, who succeeded in starting an uprising in al-Basra. Associated with him was a certain 'Isa ibn Zaid ibn 'Ali. Again al-Mansur, or his commanders, marched against them with the troops, and they defeated and killed both Ibrahim and 'Isa. Ja'far as-Sadiq had forewarned them of the consequences of this uprising, and they count his forewarning them among his miracles.

There were some among them who said that the Imam who succeeded Muhammad ibn Abdullah, an-Nafs az-Zakiyya, was Muhammad ibn al-Kasim ibn 'Ali ibn 'Ali ibn 'Omar. 'Omar was the brother of Zaid ibn 'Ali. Muhammad ibn al-Kasim took up arms in Taligan, but they came against him, and he was led in captivity to al-Mu'tasim, who put him in prison, where he died.

Others of the Zaidis said that the Imam after Yahyá ibn Zaid was his brother 'Isa, the same man who was along with Ibrahim ibn Abdullah, when they were both killed by al-Mansur. They traced the imamate to him, and on his right the claims of the Zanji are based, as we mentioned in our account of them. And there were others who held that the imam after Muhammad ibn Abdullah was his brother Idris, who fled to the Maghrib and died there. His son, Idris ibn Idris, rose up in his place and founded the town of Fez. After him certain kings succeeded him in the Maghrib until they became extinct, as we mentioned in our description of them. After this the Zaidis were entirely disorganized.

But from among those who remained there was a missionary who gained authority in Tabaristan, i. e., al-Hasan ibn Zaid ibn Muhammad ibn Isma'il ibn al-Hasan ibn Zaid ibn al-Hasan, the "grandson," and his brother was Muhammad ibn Zaid. An-Nasir al-Atrush (the deaf defender) also announced his claim to the imamate in Daylam, and the people became Moslems through him: his name was al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn 'Omar. This 'Omar was the brother of Zaid ibn 'Ali, and his descendants held the government in Tabaristan. The



was by their help that the Daylamites gained the authority and supremacy over the caliphs at Baghdad, as we showed in our account of them.

The Imamís traced the imamate from 'Ali, the *wasí*, to his son al-Hasan by *designation*, then to al-Hasan's brother al-Husain; then to his son 'Ali Zain al-Abidin; then to his son Muhammad Bagir; and then to his son Ja'far as-Sadiq. But from this point there are two lines of descent. One division traces the imamate to Ja'far as-Sadiq's son, Musa al-Qazim. They are the Ithna 'Ashariyya, the "Twelvers," who stop with the twelfth imam, and adhere to the doctrine of his *concealment* until his return at the end of the age.

The Isma'ilís hold to the imamate of Isma'il, as the imam by the clear statement of his father Ja'far as-Sadiq. From their point of view his designation was adequate, for even if he did die before his father, nevertheless, the imamate remained in his line of descendants, as in the story of Aaron with Moses, (Koran xx:31 and xxv:37). They say that the imamate then passed from Isma'il to his son Muhammad al-Makhtum, and that he was the first of the imams to be concealed. For, according to them, as he did not have great strength, his missionaries held forth the hope of his return as an appeal to the people. When he gets the needed strength he will appear and make known his claim. They say that Muhammad al-Makhtum was succeeded by his son Ja'far al-Musadiq, and he in turn was followed by his son Muhammad al-Habib, who was the last of the concealed imams. For he was succeeded by his son 'Uбайдullah al-Mahdi, whose missionary, Abu 'Abdullah, the Shi'ite, appeared among the Kitama, and the people responded to his invitation. The missionary then brought him out from his place of restraint in Sajilmása and he ruled over Kairwan and the Maghrib. His sons after him ruled over Egypt, as is shown in the records about them.

The Isma'ilís got this name on account of their belief in the imamate of Isma'il. They were also called Batinís

on account of their adherence to the doctrine of the hidden or concealed imam. Again they were called the al-Mulhida-ratahida because of some of their sacrilegious teachings. While some of their doctrines were old, there were others that were new, which al-Hasan ibn Muhammad as-Saba preached in the end of the fifth century (after the Hijra). He gained certain strongholds in Syria and Iraq, and he did not lose his hold there until the general destruction distributed them between the Turkish rulers in Egypt and the Tatar rulers in Iraq.

The *Ithna 'Ashariyya*, who are often spoken of as the Imamís, are among the more modern representatives of that sect. They assert the imamate of Musa al-Kasim ibn Ja'far, claiming that he succeeded to the imamate on the death of his older brother, Isma'il, who was imam while their father was still living. But before he died, Ja'far had also designated Musa for the imamate. Then his son 'Ali ar-Rida became the Imam. He was the one to whom al-Ma'mun bequeathed (the Caliphate), but who died before Ma'mun, so that the bequest was not carried out. Then his son, Muhammad at-Taqi, became the Imam, and he was followed by his son 'Ali al-Hadi, and then came his son, al-Hasan al-Askari, and finally his son, Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Muntazar (the one they are waiting for) as we have described.

But in regard to each of these doctrines the Shi'ites have many differences of opinion besides the ones I have mentioned. Whoever wishes to study and examine them in detail has the "Books on Religions and Sects," *Kutub al-Milal wal-Nihal*, by Ibn Hazm, Shahrastani, and others. "He causeth whom He will to err, and whom He will He guideth," (Koran xvi; 95, Rodwell).

Mehed, Persia.

DWIGHT M. DONALDSON.

⁴ The doctrines taught by this as-Saba are mentioned in the book, *al-Milal wal-Nihal*, "The Religions and Sects," by Shahrastani, (Caretton text, p. 150; Harroldcker trans., p. 220).

