

Encounters with the Hidden
Imam in Early and Pre-Modern
Twelver Shī'ī Islam



BY

OMID GHAEMMAGHAMI

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Encounters with the Hidden Imam in Early and Pre-Modern Twelver
Shī'i Islam

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Cover illustration: وَسَيَأْتِي شِيعَتِي مَنْ يَدَّعِي الْمَشَاهِدَةَ. A passage from the final rescript (*tawqīʿ*) attributed to the Hidden Imam from the period known as the Minor or Lesser Occultation. Translation: “And [before I reappear], some will come to my followers claiming to have seen [me] with their own eyes.”

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For B. Todd Lawson

وما رأيت إلا جميلا



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بیش از این گفتن مرا در خوی نیست
بحر را گنجایش اندر جوی نیست

A Note on Transliteration and Style

The transliteration of Arabic and Persian words, names, and titles follows the official “IJMES (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*) Transliteration Chart” with some 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. Some terms and place names of Persian or Arabic origin that have well-established English equivalents or are found in common English lexicons (e.g., Ayatollah, Baghdad, hadith, Imam, Islam, Quran, Tehran, ulama) appear in their familiar form unless they occur as part of a quotation. Whenever two dates are provided and separated by a (/), they denote AH (*Anno Hegirae*) and CE (Common Era), unless otherwise abbreviated by Sh. (*Anno Shamsi*). If only one date or century is mentioned, it corresponds to CE. Documentation follows an abbreviated form of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition, with minor adaptations. For example, in order to reduce the bulk of documentation, shortened citations have been used throughout, including the first time a work is cited. Abbreviations to printed and online editions of reference articles are listed below.

<i>DJI</i>	<i>Dānishnāmih-yi jahān-i islām</i> (Tehran, 1375 Sh./1996–)
<i>DJI</i> (online)	<i>Dānishnāmih-yi jahān-i islām</i> , available online at http://rch.ac.ir/
<i>DMBI</i> (online)	<i>Dā’irat al-ma’ārif-i buzurg-i islāmī</i> , available online at https://www.cgie.org.ir/fa/publication/volumes/63
<i>EIO</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Islamica Online</i> , available online at http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-islamica
<i>DMT</i>	<i>Dā’irat al-ma’ārif-i tashayyu’</i> (Tehran, 1366 Sh./1988–)
<i>EI¹</i>	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam: A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples</i> (1st edition, Leiden, 1913–36)
<i>EI²</i>	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> (2nd edition, Leiden, 1955–2005)
<i>EI³</i> (online)	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> (3rd edition, 2007–), available online: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3
<i>Elr</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i> (London, 1982–)
<i>Elr</i> (online)	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i> (New York, 1996–), available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān</i> (Leiden, 2001–2006)
<i>ER</i>	<i>The Encyclopedia of Religion</i> (2nd edition, Detroit, 2005)

- OEIW* (online) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (New York, 2009), available online at http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/Public/book_oeiw.html
- OB* Oxford Bibliographies, available online at <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>

Introduction

The earliest surviving Imāmī/Twelve Shiʿī sources identify the Imam as the spiritual and temporal guide of the world. As noted by Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi in his landmark *Le guide divin dans le shīʿisme originel*, these sources define the Imam as a “cosmic necessity”: “without the Imam, the universe would crumble, since he is the Proof, the Manifestation, and the Organ of God, and he is the Means by which human beings can attain, if not knowledge of God, at least what is knowable in God.”¹ *Walāya*—the duty to intimately love, incessantly support, and remain ever devoted and loyal to the Imam—is consistently defined as one of the three or five pillars of religion, if not its most vital.² The same sources demands recognition of the Imam as the speaking Quran³ and the living source of knowledge.⁴ Yet, according to the Imāmī/Twelve Shiʿa,⁵ the Imam of the present age, the twelfth and final

- 1 Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 125 [= Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 303].
- 2 See the hadiths recorded in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 2:18–24 (*bāb daʿāʾim al-islām*) (nos. 1–15), especially no. 5, where, among obligatory prayer, the giving of alms, pilgrimage, fasting, and *walāya*, it is *walāya* that is singled out as the most excellent and meritorious (*afḍal*), inasmuch as *walāya* is the key by which the others are opened. See also Carney, “The Personal Imam.” On the significance of *walāya* in Shiʿī Islam, see Amir-Moezzi, “Notes à propos de la Walāya Imamite”; Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*; Landolt, “Walāyah,” *ER*, 14:9656–9662; Lawson, *Tafsir as Mystical Experience*, 9–47.
- 3 See, e.g., al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 64 (no. 13), where the Imam is called “God’s mouthpiece” (*lisān Allāh al-nāṭiq*). On the Imam as the speaking book (*al-kitāb al-nāṭiq*), without which one cannot grasp the true or primary meaning of the silent book (the Quran), see Ayyoub, “The Speaking Qurʾān”; Lawson, “Hermeneutics,” *ELr*, 12:235–9; Rizvi, “The Speaking Qurʾān and the Praise of the Imam,” 135–42.
- 4 According to a well-known 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 imāmun* [var., *wa-lā yaʿrifu/wa-lam yaʿrif imāmahu*] *māta mītan jāhiliyyatan*), Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*¹, 83. Hadiths found in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:337, 342, declare that those who fail to recognize the Imam have strayed from their religion. See also the five hadiths mentioned in the first chapter of the “Kitāb al-Ḥujja” of al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfi*, 1:168–74; 2:398 (no. 5) and the seven hadiths recorded in chapter 25 of al-Nuʿmānī’s *al-Ghayba*, 350–2; McDermott, *The Theology*, 51; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 190–2 (section titled “The Duty of Knowing (*maʿrifa*) the Imam”).
- 5 I use Imāmī, Twelver, and Imāmī/Twelve Shiʿī/Shiʿa interchangeably to refer to the proto-Ithnāʿasharī (Twelver) community/“sect” (*firqa*) that later became known (and is still known today) primarily as the Ithnāʿashariyya (“Twelver Shiʿa”). In Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ashʿarī al-Qummī’s (d. 299/911–2 or 301/913–4) *Kitāb al-Maqālāt wa-l-firqa*, 102, the author states that this *firqa* “is famously known as the Imāmiyya” (*al-maʿrifa bi-l-imāmiyya*). As Kohlberg first pointed out, the term “Ithnāʿashariyya” (Twelver) does not appear in extant Imāmī

Imam—the living source of knowledge and the lodestar of faith—disappeared in the late third/ninth century and has been in an ongoing state of concealment (*ghayba*) for more than eleven hundred years.⁶ When one considers that the Hidden Imam has been defined and described in Imāmī/Twelve sources as “the remnant of God” (Quran 11:86), “the light of God” (Quran 61:8), “the lord of the [final] age,” “the master of time,” and “the most favored, the most clement, and the most knowledgeable of the Imams,”⁷ one cannot help but be sensitive to the distressing repercussions of his indefinite absence on a community that yearns for his reappearance and ensuing intervention to redress the concatenation of wrongs, ignominies, and setbacks believed by the Imāmī/Twelve Shī‘a to have been inflicted upon each of their Imams and on their community at various stages of its history. One of the most grievous of these setbacks was the alleged disappearance of the twelfth Imam himself. The intellectual, philosophical, spiritual, social, and political history of Shī‘ī Islam since the moment the Imam vanished can be seen as a history of attempts to explain his disappear-

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 Imāmīyya and Shī‘ī/Shī‘a. See Kohlberg, “From Imāmīyya,” 521 n. 2; Kohlberg, “Early Attestations,” 351–4. See also Sander, *Zwischen Charisma*, 5 n. 2; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 247–8 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 100–1]. Cf. al-Murtaḍā[al-Mufīd], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 321: “Among the *firaq* we have mentioned [of the *firaq* that split after the passing of the al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the eleventh Imam], the only *firaq* that still exists in our time, which is the year 373/983–4, is the Twelver-Imāmī (*al-imāmīyya al-ithnā ‘ashariyya*) whose followers believe in the imamate of (al-‘Askarī’s) son and who are certain that he is alive and will continue to live until the time he rises with the sword.” The label “Ithnā-‘ashariyya” appears to have been used by non-Shī‘ī authors after the *ghayba* of the twelfth Imam to describe the sect as a way of distinguishing this community from other ‘Alid (= Shī‘at ‘Alī) currents (viz., the Zaydiyya and the Ismā‘īliyya). The decision of most early Imāmī Shī‘ī ulama to largely shun the label “Ithnā ‘asharī” likely reflects a desire to avoid using an outsider’s nomenclature and a belief that their sect represents the true (and only) form of (Imāmī/Shī‘ī) faith.

- 6 On the genesis and early development of the idea of *ghayba* (lit., concealment, absence, disappearance, invisibility, though commonly translated as “occultation”) in Shī‘ī history and theology, on the belief in the physical disappearance of the Imam and its roots in pre-Islamic religions, and on the related doctrine of *raǰ‘a* (return), see MacDonald and Hodgson, “Ghayba,” *EI*², 2:1026; al-Qāḍī, *al-Kaysāniyya*; van Ess, “Das *Kitāb al-irǰā‘*”; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* 1:306–9; Kohlberg, “Raǰ‘a,” *EI*², 8:371–3; Amir Arjomand, “Gayba,” *Elr*, 10:341–4; Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 41–3; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 244–6; Amir-Moezzi, “Raǰ‘a,” *Elr* (online); Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 11–28; Ansari, *L’imamat et l’Occultation selon l’imamisme*; Hayes, “The Envoys of the Hidden Imam,” 16–32.
- 7 [= *afḍaluhum aḥlamuhum a‘lamuhum*] This is according to a hadith of the Prophet Muḥammad transmitted on the authority of Salmān. See al-Ḥalabī, *Taqrib al-ma‘ārif*, 420; al-‘Āmilī, *Mawsū‘at al-shahīd al-thānī*, 4:39 n. 4.

ance, negotiate or exploit his absence, and answer the burning questions of when, where, and how he will return.

Traditionally, the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam has been neatly divided into two phases. The difference between the two phases is said to relate to the possibility of seeing or encountering the Imam. In the first phase, this was considered possible, while in the second phase it is generally assumed not to be possible. The first phase is said to have commenced with the Imam's disappearance as a young child in 260/874.⁸ The next seven decades, known as the Minor or Lesser Occultation (*al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*),⁹ are a period in which the Imam is said to have been seen by many, and to have communicated with his small band of followers via (primarily) four authorized emissaries (*safīr*, pl. *sufarā'*),¹⁰ the last of whom died in or around the year 329/941.¹¹ It is alleged that six days prior to the passing of the fourth and final emissary, he furnished a signed letter or rescript (*tawqī'*) from the hidden Imam—the last of many *tawqī'āt* that were issued in the Imam's name or are said to have been written or dictated by the Imam during this first phase. The final *tawqī'* announced that no further intermediaries would appear or be appointed, because “the Second Occultation” (*al-ghayba al-thāniya*), commonly referred to in later sources as “the Complete Occultation” (*al-ghayba al-tāmma*) or “the Major” or “Greater Occultation” (*al-ghayba al-kubrā*), had now begun.

8 Most Shī'ī scholars mark the start of the Minor or Lesser Occultation from the death of the eleventh Imam in 260/874, while a minority argue that the Minor Occultation began with the Hidden Imam's birth, which is given as different days and months in the years 254/868, 255/869, 256/870, 257/871, 258/872, and 259/872–3. On these variant dates, see Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 77 n. 123.

9 For scholarly studies of the period that came to be known as the Minor or Lesser Occultation, see now the thorough work by Hayes, “The Envoys of the Hidden Imam.” See also Ansari, *L'imamat*, esp. 229–35; Amir Arjomand, “Imam *Absconditus*”; Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis”; Abdulsater, “Dynamics of Absence”; Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 85–98; Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 70–105; Klemm, “Die vier *sufarā'*” [the main points of this article are summarized in Klemm, “Islam in Iran ix. The Deputies of Mahdī,” *Elr*, 14:143–6]; and Ali, “Safire des Zwölften Imāms.”

10 *Safīr* can also be translated as envoy, representative, messenger, commissioned agent, and the like. The word is derived from a root that connotes traveling; uncovering something that is not apparent; and writing.

11 However, scholars point out that in the extant sources from the period of the Lesser Occultation, including al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*, there is no mention that any individuals were formally designated as the Imam's emissary (*safīr*), but rather there is a network of deputies and agents (*wukalā'*) who knew the location of the Imam. See Newman, “Between Qumm and the West,” 95; Hayes, “The Envoys of the Hidden Imam.” On the *sufarā'*, see Kohlberg, “Safir 1. In Shī'ism,” *ET*², 8:811–2; Klemm, “Die vier *sufarā'*”; and chapter 3 of this book.

The Imam's final communication concluded with a warning followed by a declaration. It warned that before he reappears, certain of the Imam's followers will attempt to deceive others by claiming to have seen and encountered him; but everyone should know that whoever claims or purports to have seen him is a fraud, prone to mendacity:

[Before I reappear], some [or someone] will come to my followers 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 impostor.¹²

With this sentence, we are presented with what are, purportedly, the final words of the Hidden Imam, quoted in a work only three decades removed from the start of the Greater Occultation. According to the standard Shī'ī narrative, this second phase of the Imam's hidden presence will continue until he emerges from concealment at the end of time, the Imam having abnegated his rights and authority to the clergy (jurists and ulama) in the interregnum.¹³

The final *tawqī'ī* of the Hidden Imam has long posed an epistemological challenge to the Shī'ī ulama, one to which they have responded in flexible ways. My objective in this book is to show that initially, in the early years of the Greater Occultation, Shī'ī authorities maintained that contact with the Imam was mostly severed, forcing him to remain incommunicado until his reappearance. This position, however, proved untenable to maintain. More than two hundred years after the final *tawqī'ī*, accounts appeared detailing encounters between the Imam and the most privileged of his followers. The earliest stories are few in number. The paucity of accounts indicates a reluctance to break free from the implications of the final *tawqī'ī*. In these rare, early accounts, the Imam is often presented as a miracle worker, a guide to lost pilgrims, or a healer of seemingly incurable diseases. Later, the accounts exponentially increase in number, become more embellished, and take on a different tone. Although they vary in certain details, the accounts feature common patterns and utilize a similar stock of devices, images, and tropes to describe encounters between a select cadre of Shī'a and the concealed, yet unconcealed, Imam. While the

12 For a discussion of this letter, see chapter 3.

13 See Eliash, "The Ithnā 'asharī"; Madelung, "Authority in Twelver Shiism"; Amir-Moezzi, "Remarques sur les critères"; Amir-Moezzi, "Islam in Iran x. The Roots of Political Shi'ism," *Elr* (online); Sachedina, "Activist Shi'ism", passim, esp. 410; Stewart, "An Eleventh-Century Justification"; al-Mūsawī, *al-Imām al-mahdī*, 113–5.

Imam continues working miracles, in some of these later accounts, he also answers vexing legal or theological questions of prominent ulama who meet him. In essence, he provides the same direct knowledge that is believed to have been suspended when the Lesser Occultation ended and the Greater Occultation began. This suggests that, epistemologically, remarkably little has changed about the nature and purpose of the *ghayba* from the time of the Lesser Occultation.

Claims of encounters with religious figures, whether hidden or dead, are, of course, not exclusive to Imāmī/Twelve Shīʿī Islam. Stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam are analogous to accounts of Marian apparitions, visions of Christ, meetings with the tenth Sikh Guru, and dreams and visions of the Prophet Muḥammad, the first eleven Imams of Imāmī/Twelve Shīʿī Islam, and other friends of God (*awliyāʾ*) and sacred figures in Islam, among others.¹⁴ The stories of contact and encounters with the Hidden Imam thus can be said to form a mode and expression of pious belief represented in some religious biographical and hagiographical sources.

Although the focus of this book is on encounters with the Hidden Imam in mainly the early and premodern periods (defined here as roughly the late third/ninth to early thirteenth/nineteenth centuries), it is important to note that the last two centuries have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of accounts detailing such encounters.¹⁵ Stories of sightings, contact, and meetings with the Hidden Imam constitute a recurring and salient theme in many of the books and articles that have been published in Arabic and Persian on the Hidden Imam since the late nineteenth century.¹⁶ These books and arti-

14 On apparitions of the Virgin Mary and Jesus, see Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*; Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus*. On dreams in Islam, see Schimmel, *Die Träume des Kalifen*; Felek and Knysh (eds.), *Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies*; Marlow (ed.), *Dreaming Across Boundaries*. On encounters with the Prophet Muḥammad, see Sirriyeh, *Dreams and Visions in the World of Islam*, 140–57. On dreams of the Imams and other sacred figures in Islam, see Amir-Moezzi, “Visions d’Imams”; Sindawi, “The Image of ‘Alī in the Dreams of Visitors to His Tomb”; Mittermaier, *Dreams That Matter*; Szanto Ali-Dib, “Following Sayyida Zaynab,” 120, 179–93. On encounters with the tenth Sikh Guru, see Luis, “The Khanda,” 170–1, 178.

15 The accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam that have proliferated since the nineteenth century require further study and analysis. The brief comments here and the anecdotes mentioned in the conclusion about the modern period are meant to highlight the relevance of the issue for the contemporary period.

16 See e.g., Mahdīpūr, *Kitābnāmih-yi ḥaḍrat-i mahdī* (published in 1375 Sh./1996), a slightly annotated bibliography of Arabic and Persian books about the Hidden Imam that introduces 2,066 works; and Bunyād-i Farhang-i Ḥaḍrat-i Mahdī-i Mawʿūd, *Kitābshināsī-i mahdāvīyyat* (originally published in 1382 Sh./2004) that introduces some 3,500 works (i.e.,

cles feature stories of ulama who are said to have met the Imam during the period of the Greater Occultation. Often, the stories are read into earlier centuries. In addition, numerous websites and blogs have been created to recount stories of prominent ulama who have met the Hidden Imam and performed “miraculous works” (*karāmāt*).¹⁷ This is to say nothing of the books dedicated to the topic of encounters with the Hidden Imam that have been produced in Arabic and Persian over the last thirty years, including such titles as *‘Ināyāt-i ḥaḍrat-i mahdī bih ‘ulamā’ va ṭullāb* (The manifold favors of the Mahdī to ulama and students of the Shīrī seminary) by Muḥammad-Riḍā Bāqī-İşfahānī; *‘Ināyāt-i ḥaḍrat-i mahdī-i maw‘ūd bih ‘ulamā’ va marāji’-i taqlīd* (The manifold favors of the promised Mahdī to ulama and sources of emulation) by Ayatollah ‘Alī Karīmī Jahrumī;¹⁸ *Arwa’ al-qiṣaṣ fi-man ra’ā l-mahdī fi ghaybatihī al-kubrā* (The most wondrous tales of those who have seen the Mahdī during his Greater Occultation) by Mājid Nāṣir al-Zubaydī; and *Mulāqāt-i ‘ulamā-yi buzurġ-i islām bā imām-i zamān* (The encounters of eminent ulama with the Imam of the Age) by Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā’ī.¹⁹

approximately 75 percent more books and articles). Hundreds, if not thousands, of articles and books have been written since 2004.

- 17 See, for example, “Mulāqāt bā imām-i zamān” (Encountering the Imam of the Age), 22 February 2017, <http://mahdinow.rozblog.com>; “Tasharrufāt-i khidmat-i valī-i ‘aṣr” (Attaining the presence of the Guardian of the Age), 30 December 2018, <https://tasharrof.org/>.
- 18 An Arabic translation of this collection has also been published. Al-Jahrumī, *Ri’āyat al-imām al-mahdī li-l-marāji’ wa-l-‘ulamā’ al-a’lām*.
- 19 Other titles include *Tavajjuhāt-i valī-i ‘aṣr bih ‘ulamā’ va marāji’-i taqlīd* (The Guardian of the Age’s [i.e., the Hidden Imam] care and concern for ulama and “sources of emulation”) by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bāqirzādih Bābulī; *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i ‘aṣr: Hikāyāt-i ‘abqār al-ḥisān fi aḥwāl mawlānā ṣāhib al-zamān* (The blessings of the Guardian of the Age: Stories of the fine wonders of beauty concerning the conduct and circumstances of the lord of the [final] age) by ‘Alī-Akbar Nahāvandī, compiled by Sayyid Javād Mu’allim; *Karāmāt-i ‘ulamā’* (The miracles of the ulama) by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bāqirzādih Bābulī; *Arvāḥ-i mihrabān: Ḥālāt-i ma’navī-i buzurġān bā imām-i zamān* (The benevolent souls: The mystic relationship of eminent ones [from among the ulama and religious authorities] with the Imam of the Age) by Muḥammad-Ḥasan Yūsufi; *Mulāqāt bā imām-i zamān* (Meetings with the Imam of the Age) by Ḥasan Abṭāḥī; *al-Buṣhrā fi dhikr man ḥaḍiyya bi-ru’yat al-ḥujja al-kubrā* (Glad tidings concerning those who have seen the most great proof) by Mu’assasat al-Imām al-Hādī; *Niqāh-i sabz: Mulāqāt bā imām-i zamān* (The green glance: Encounters with the Imam of the Age) by Ḥasan Jalālī-‘Azīziyān; *Dāstānhā va karāmāt-i khāndanī az imām-i zamān va a’immih-yi ma’šūmīn* (Stories and miracles worth reading of the Imam of the Age and the [other] infallible Imams) by Mīrzā-‘Alī Bābā’ī; and *Hikāyāt ‘an al-imām al-mahdī* (Stories about Imam Mahdī) by Grand Ayatollah Muḥammad Taqī Bahjat (d. 2009) (this book, the sixth and last chapter of which concerns encounters with the Hidden Imam, appears to be an Arabic translation of *Imām-i zamān dar kalām-i Ayatollah*

The stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam have played a significant role in fortifying the doctrine of the *ghayba*, intensifying faith in the Hidden Imam's existence, bolstering clerical authority, cultivating an aura of sanctity for the ulama as his representatives (and thereby strengthening their religious and social influence), and substantively freezing the eschatological tensions within Shī'ī Islam while simultaneously mitigating their severity.

Judging from the sheer number of books, articles, and websites that have appeared, and the fact that the Hidden Imam is believed to have been physically concealed since the late third/ninth century, it may be tempting to conclude that belief in the possibility of encountering the Hidden Imam has always been a part of Shī'ī doctrine. However, this is not the case. As I show, encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation are, in fact, a tradition "invented" gradually during the first three centuries of the Greater Occultation and consolidated in the centuries that followed.²⁰

1 Approaches to the Question of Encountering the Hidden Imam in Sources in Western Languages

Despite increased scholarly activity and interest in virtually every aspect of Imāmi/Twelve Shi'ī Islam over the last century (in particular since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran), studies on the development of Shī'ī messianism and eschatology have been markedly slow. And while stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam are found in hundreds of books in Persian and Arabic, the issue is relatively uncharted territory in scholarship and books written in Western languages. Consequently, the topic of encounters and contact with the Hidden Imam is one of the most observable yet paradoxically least noticed features of Shī'ī Islam and an underdeveloped subfield of the academic study of Islam in the West. In fact, other than three significant contributions by Henry

Bahjat (The Imam of the Age in the words of Ayatollah Bahjat), compiled by Muḥammad-Taqī Umīdiyān).

20 In this context, I define tradition as an established belief that is handed down, repeated, and claimed to be rooted in the past. I invoke the concept of "invented traditions" developed by British historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, who argue that many traditions that are believed to be ancient were constructed in the not-too-distant past. See Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." Hammer and Lewis, "Introduction," 2, add that "whereas Hobsbawm and Ranger point to the eighteenth century as the time when traditions began to be invented on a massive scale, the invention of sacred traditions appears to be a perennial motif in religious history."

Corbin (d. 1978)²¹ and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi—studies that focus on the esoteric or initiatory dimensions of these narratives—the subject has not received adequate attention in literature published in Western languages and has yet to be properly examined for its historical roots and implications. Here I survey the key contributions that have been made to the study of the topic in Western languages and point out 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 Hungarian orientalist Ignác Goldziher (d. 1921). In a footnote to his *Vorlesungen über den Islam* (first published in 1910), Goldziher refers to “fables” of believers who received signed letters (that is, *tawqīrāt*) from the Hidden Imam and alludes to those who claimed to have seen him.²² In view of the paucity of Shiʿī sources available to him, and the

21 On Corbin, see Janis Esots, “Corbin, Henry,” *EIO*; Shayegan, “Corbin, Henry,” *Elr*, 6:268–72.

22 Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam*, 232 [= Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 201 n. 98]. Prior to Goldziher, Gobineau (d. 1882), in his *Trois ans en Asie*, 305 (first published in 1859) stated that “les théologiens officiels” claim that the Imam moves from place to place to avoid being recognized, but Gobineau makes no mention of stories of those who have seen him. Likewise, British orientalist E.G. Browne (d. 1926), who traveled to Iran in 1887, never refers to stories of sightings of the Imam, but throughout his works repeats, without providing a source, in a *prima facie* manner that “[t]he Shiʿites hold that (the Hidden Imam) did not die, but disappeared in an underground passage in Surra-man-Raʿa [= Samarra], A.H. 329; [and] that he still lives in one of those mysterious cities, Jābulqā and Jābulsā.” Browne, *Traveller’s Narrative*, 298. Browne repeats the same assertion in other works, e.g., Browne, *The Tārīkh-i-Jadīd*, 287 n. 1; Browne, “Bābism,” 334 [cited in, Browne, *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne* (ed. Momen), 408]; Browne, *A Literary History*, 1:246 n. 1; Browne, “Bāb, Bābīs,” *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, 2:300. Following Browne’s lead, and without citing sources other than Browne, Western sources to the present day repeat the idea that the Imam is hiding in the cities of Jābulqā and Jābulsā (alternatively spelled or vocalized as the following: Jābalqā, Jābalsā, Jābulšā, Jābalšā, Jābarsā, or Jābarsā), see, e.g., Seoharvi, “Bahāism,” 412 (pub. 1907); Gilmore, “Babism,” *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1:394 (pub. 1908), calls Jābulqā and Jābulsā “Arabic utopias”; Friedlaender, “Jewish-Arabic Studies,” 486 (pub. 1912); Sell, “The Bāb and the Bābīs,” 50 (pub. 1901); Sell, *Bahāism* (pub. 1912), 3; Wilson, *Bahāism*, 20 (pub. 1915); Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam*, 165 (pub. 1985) 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) states that the Hidden Imam “lives in the fabulous underground cities of Jābalqā and Jābarsā”; Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium*, 21–2 (pub. 1998); and MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 16 (pub. 2009). None of these scholars provide primary sources for the notions that Jābulqā and Jābulsā are “underground” or that believers have actually traveled to these cities. An in-depth study of Jābulqā and Jābulsā and, specifically, their function in Shiʿī sources need not detain us. See Arsanjāni, “Jābulsā wa Jābulqā,” *DMBI* (online); Sajjādi and Sayyid-ʿArab, “Jābulqā va Jābulsā,” *DJI* (online); Tūnihī, *Mawʿūd-nāmih*, 238–9; ʿUthmān, *al-*

fact that the study of Shī'ī Islam was not his main area of research,²³ it is not surprising that Goldziher did not explore this topic further.

Goldziher's finding was repeated by the American scholar Duncan Black MacDonald (d. 1943), author of the short entry on *ghayba* in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. MacDonald added that the Hidden Imam is present and "unrecognized" during the season of pilgrimage in Mecca, 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*, and draw a connection between the Imam's authority and the authority of the ulama: "The earlier organization of the sect has been replaced by the presence of independently learned *mudjtahids* in the various Shī'ī centres, recognized by the community as qualified to interpret the Imām's will."²⁴

Khaṣṣībī, 113–5. The earliest classical source for the myth that the Hidden Imam is in these cities seems to be Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī's (d. 1070/1659) *Lavāmi-i-ṣāḥib-qirānī*, 4:160 (on this work and its author, see Sajjādī, "Lavāmi-i-ṣāḥib-qirānī," *DMT*, 14:528–32; Kiyānī-Farīd, "Majlisī, Muḥammad-Taqī," *DMT*, 15:78–9; Gleave, "Muhammad Taqī al-Majlisī"), an extended Persian translation of the same author's Arabic *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*, a commentary on al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*. In commenting on a prayer (attributed to the ninth Imam) that invokes blessings on the Qā'im's "descendants and family," Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī avers that it is well known (*mashhūr ast*) that the descendants of the Hidden Imam are all currently (*al-hāl mavjūdand*) in Jābulqā and Jābursā. Al-Majlisī cites some of the "numerous hadiths" with "sound" chains of transmission from al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi* and al-Ṣaffār al-Qummi's *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* that describe these cities. Al-Majlisī adds, "I have heard from my teachers (*mashāyikh*) and seen reports 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 ḥaḍrat khūd tashrif mī-āvarand bih in shahrhā*). This passage is not found in al-Majlisī's Arabic commentary, *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*. Mahdīpūr, *Kitābnāmih-yi ḥaḍrat-i mahdī*, 1:263, mentions an unpublished work titled *Jābulqā va Jābursā* by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Bahārī al-Hamadānī (d. 1333/1915) that discusses "reports (*rivāyāt*) about Jābulqā, Jābursā, and the residence (*iqāmatgāh*) of the Mahdī." Others cite hadiths that mention these cities to support the veracity of one of the most elaborate of the stories describing encounters with the Hidden Imam, viz., the lengthy account of the "Green Island in the White Sea," a story popular in the late Safavid and Qajar periods. See, e.g., al-Bāhrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 259–64; al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:623–5; al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 475. On reports that mention Jābulqā and Jābursā/Jābursā in connection with the Imam, see Zayn al-Dīn, *Muʿjam buldān*, 210–4. The Shī'ī scholar Majid Jalālī Dihkurdi (d. 1934–5) refers to the city of Samarra as the model of Jābulqā and Jābursā, as it served, during his time, as the residence of the "source of emulation" (*marji' al-taqlid*) Mirzā-yi Shirāzī (d. 1895). See Dihkurdi, *Āftāb-i ʿilm*, 96.

23 Kohlberg, "Western Studies of Shi'a Islam," 38.

24 MacDonald, "Ghayba," *EI*¹ (online). This entry was slightly expanded by Hodgson in MacDonald and Hodgson, "Ghayba," *EI*², 2:1026.

Jawad Ali's *Der Mahdī der Zwölfer-Schi'a und seine vier Safire*, written in the late 1930s and made available to me in an Arabic translation, contains a chapter on the Greater Occultation, in which the author states that he has heard of numerous encounters that have taken place between ulama and the Hidden Imam. Ali proceeds to describe how Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1902), a Shī'ī scholar who compiled two collections of these stories in the late nineteenth century, attempted to negotiate the apparent contradiction between these stories and the Imam's warning in the final *tawqī'*.²⁵

More recently, Hasan Ansari, in his comprehensive bibliographic study *L'imamat et l'Occultation selon l'imamisme*, while affirming that the last *tawqī'* "explicitly states that any visual encounter with the Hidden Imam is now impossible until the End of Time," acknowledges that "dozens of people" have claimed to have met the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation.²⁶

Most introductory works on Shī'ī Islam or the Imams have been silent or treated the subject of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation as, at best, a minor issue. In his short biographical sketch of the twelve Imams, originally published in 1923, the Anglican missionary Edward Sell (d. 1932) notes the presence of many "fanciful" accounts of the Imam appearing to "his favoured ones" in order to strengthen their faith in his existence.²⁷ Dwight Donaldson's (d. 1976) 1933 monograph, the first book-length survey of Shī'ī Islam in a European language, refers readers to MacDonald's statements in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.²⁸ Moojan Momen's *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* includes two short references to the subject,²⁹ while Heinz Halm's *Die Schia* and *Der schiitische Islam: von der Religion zur Revolution*, Yann Richard's *L'islam chiite: Croyances et idéologies*, Hamid Dabashi's *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest*, Farhad Daftary's *A History of Shi'i Islam*, and Andrew Newman's *Twelver Shiism: Unity and Diversity in the Life of Islam, 632 to 1722*, among other introductions, treat the matter of contact and communication with the Hidden Imam as closed.³⁰

25 'Alī, *al-Mahdī l-muntazar*, 259–60.

26 Ansari, *L'imamat*, 230 n. 605. Ansari adds that stories of encounters with the Imam are now a flourishing genre of Shī'ī literature. He directs readers to Amir-Moezzi's article "Contribution à la Typologie" (on which, see below).

27 Sell, *Ithna 'Ashariyya*, 55.

28 Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion*, 235. On Donaldson, see Avery, "Donaldson," *Elr*, 7:492.

29 Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 165, 199. See also Momen, *Shi'i Islam*, 185.

30 Halm, *Die Schia* [= Halm, *Shi'ism* (trans. Watson and Hill)]; Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, 29, states that after the Lesser Occultation, "the Hidden Imam decided to break off all contact and retreat totally from humanity. In his last letter, he is said to have announced his intention, branding as a liar anyone claiming in the future to have had contact with him." Richard,

Likewise, few introductory works written with an emic approach, and available in Western languages, broach the subject. Two examples are Ayatollah Ja'far Subhānī's compendium of Shī'ī beliefs titled *Manshūr-i 'aqāyid-i imāmiyyih*, available in English translation under the title *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam*, and Sayed Ammar Nakshawani's *The Fourteen Infallibles*. Subhānī states that "throughout history, numerous devout and pure-hearted individuals who were worthy of the honor of attaining the presence [of the Hidden Imam] have met him and drawn—and continue to draw—benefits from him. Others have benefited from the blessings of the Imam's existence through them."³¹ Although Subhānī does not refer to specific accounts, he seems to refer, primarily, to stories of ulama claiming to have seen the Imam. Nakshawani suggests, in response to the question of whether the Imam can be seen during the Greater Occultation, that the Hidden Imam "visits a number of people a year" during the pilgrimage, at the funeral of a man who dies without any debts, and whenever "someone is troubled" and "calls out to the Imam."³²

Studies relying on historical methodologies have not carried matters forward on the topic of encounters with the Hidden Imam. Blichfeldt's instructive survey of early Islamic sources on the Mahdī asserts that during the Greater Occultation, the Imam's followers are "shut off from any kind of communication."³³ Jassim Hussain's monograph, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background*, presents a traditional picture of the early *ghayba* works. While most of Hussain's discussion covers the period of the Lesser Occultation, the penultimate chapter of his book discusses the implications of the Greater

L'islam chiite [= Richard, *Shi'ite Islam* (trans. Nevill)]; Dabashi, *Shi'ism*, 64, categorically states that "the gate of direct communication between the Hidden and his community was closed" after the end of the Lesser Occultation; Daftary, *A History of Shi'i Islam*; Newman, *Twelver Shiism*. Cf. Haider, *Shi'i Islam*, 97 states that "all conventional contact with the Imām was severed" in the Greater Occultation.

31 Subhānī, *Manshūr-i 'aqāyid-i imāmiyyih*, 177. For an alternate translation, see Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam*, 117.

32 Nakshawani, *The Fourteen Infallibles*, 263. Other examples of introductory works available in Western languages and written from an emic approach include Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam* (trans. Nasr) and Shomali, *Shi'i Islam: Origins, Faith and Practices*. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981), known as 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī, implicitly refers to the subject of encounters with the Imam when he writes, "The Imam watches over [(*ishrāf*)] men inwardly and is in communion [(*ittiṣāl*)] with the soul and spirit of men even if he be hidden from their physical eyes." Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam* (trans. Nasr), 214 [= Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shī'ah dar Islām*, 152]. See also Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Khulāshih-yi ta'ālīm-i islām* [= Tabataba'ī, *Islamic Teachings* (trans. Campbell)]. In the short section of his work on the Mahdī, Shomali does not pose the question of whether the Hidden Imam can be seen, but in the section of his book on the city of Qum he refers to the story of an encounter with the Hidden Imam in Jamkarān. Shomali, *Shi'i Islam*.

33 Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism*, 9.

Occultation for the Shī'ī community in general and the ulama in particular. However, in this chapter, Hussain does not offer any references to the subject of encounters with the Imam.³⁴

Hussain's treatment of the Hidden Imam has much in common with the only other book-length historical survey of the enduring Shī'ī belief in this figure: Abdulaziz Sachedina's *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism*. In the introduction, Sachedina alludes to the doctrine of *al-niyāba 'al-āmma* (the general representation of the Imam) in 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."³⁵ Yet, he never undertakes a serious engagement with the subject of encounters with the Hidden Imam. In a section titled "The Miraculous Appearance of the Mahdi at the *Hajj*," Sachedina devotes two paragraphs to the subject. He writes that "the Shi'ites assert" that the Imam resides in the vicinity of Mecca where he appears each year during the pilgrimage season.³⁶ He then refers readers to several accounts that describe encounters with the Imam in Mecca during the Lesser Occultation. Years later, in the introduction of his English translation of Ayatollah Ibrāhīm Amīnī's (b. 1304 Sh./1925) *Dād-gustar-i jahān*, Sachedina speaks approvingly of the author's presentation of "rational arguments to discredit some of the stories about meetings with the twelfth Imam that have been accepted uncritically by some scholars of *hadith*."³⁷

Etan Kohlberg was among the first Western scholars to draw attention to missives putatively written by the Hidden Imam and presented to a Shī'ī scholar (al-Shaykh al-Mufid) in the first century of the Greater Occultation.³⁸ (As I show, the earliest work that cites these letters, albeit without a chain of transmission, was written over a century after the death of al-Mufid, who in his own writings argues against the possibility of anyone having contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation.) Kohlberg also makes an important passing reference to seven stories of contacts with the Imam—each of which involves a healing or some other supernatural event—then states that "it can be seen that the Imam appears mainly as a consoler or a miracle worker; unlike the

34 Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*.

35 Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 23.

36 Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 75. Referred to in Peterson, "Eschatology," *OEIW* (online).

37 Amīnī, *al-Imām al-Mahdī: The Just Leader of Humanity* (trans. Sachedina), ii.

38 Kohlberg, "Authoritative Scriptures," 308. The letters to al-Mufid were also reproduced in 'Alī, *al-Mahdī l-munṭazar*, 289–94. As mentioned earlier, this is the Arabic translation of Ali, *Der Mahdī der Zwölfer-Schi'a und seine vier Safire*, completed in the late 1930s. On al-Shaykh al-Mufid and the alleged letters of the Hidden Imam to him, see below, chapters 3 and 4.

situation in the Minor Occultation, in the Major Occultation he appears only infrequently in order to answer legal questions.”³⁹ The scope of his article did not provide space to provide examples of such encounters.

Other books and articles in which one might expect to see a discussion or at least references to the subject are either silent or offer intriguing hints. Sachedina's *The Just Ruler (al-Sulṭān al-ʿĀdil) in Shīʿite Islam* is an ambitious theoretical study of the social and political role of the ulama in the absence of the Imam.⁴⁰ Yet here as well, there is no mention of the stories of encounters with the Imam. In a study of charismatic authority (along Weberian lines) in Shīʿī Islam, Liyakat Takim speaks of Shīʿī biographical works “replete with accounts of ... miraculous deeds” ascribed to the ulama, but does not refer to the accounts of encounters with the Imam featured in many of these sources.⁴¹

It is also surprising that the numerous studies that chart the manner in which the sacrosanct authority of the Hidden Imam has been arrogated to themselves by the Shīʿī ulama, who, beginning in the sixteenth century CE, presented themselves as the “general representatives” of the Hidden Imam and gradually appropriated and exercised the rights, prerogatives, and privileges traditionally reserved for the Imams in the classical sources do not discuss this issue. Chief among these rights are (1) carrying out the legal punishments or sanctions of the Quran (*iqāmat al-ḥudūd*), (2) leading the Friday congregational prayer (*ṣalāt al-jumʿa*),⁴² (3) waging defensive war (*jihād*), and (4) receiving and spending the Imam's share (*sahm al-imām*) of the *khums* (a tax intended for pious purposes).⁴³

While the theoretical basis of the ulama's authority and its historical development has been the subject of numerous studies, many of which invoke Max Weber's theories of charisma and its routinization, the issue of encounters with the Imam has received scant attention in these works.⁴⁴ In fact, only six schol-

39 Kohlberg, “Authoritative Scriptures,” 309.

40 Sachedina, *The Just Ruler*.

41 Takim, *The Heirs of the Prophet*, 94.

42 On the debate among jurists (*fuqahāʿ*) concerning whether it is permissible to convene the Friday prayer during the *ghayba*, see Algar, “Emām-e Jomʿa,” *ELr*, 8:386–91; Abisaab, “Moral Authority,” 146–8.

43 For a succinct description of these four domains, see Amir-Moezzi, “Islam in Iran x. The Roots of Political Shiʿism,” *ELr* (online).

44 See, for example, Eliash, “The Ithnā ʿasharī”; Eliash, “Misconceptions”; Eliash, “The Twelfth Imam”; Madelung, “Authority in Twelver Shiism”; Lambton, “A Reconsideration”; Keddie, “The Roots of the Ulama's Power”; Calder, “Judicial Authority in Imāmī Shīʿī Jurisprudence”; Calder, “Khums in Imami Shīʿī Jurisprudence”; Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785–1906*; Algar, “Fatwā,” *ELr*, 9:428–36; Newman, “The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran, Part 2,” 258–61; Moaddel, “The Shīʿī Ulama”; Cole, *Sacred Space*

ars from those whose works are listed in note 44 refer in a significant way to these stories: Amanat,⁴⁵ Amir Arjomand,⁴⁶ Brunner,⁴⁷ MacEoin,⁴⁸ Madelung,⁴⁹ and Stewart.⁵⁰

The same omission is consequently reflected in several entries published in encyclopedias and reference guides on Islam, where one might expect to

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- and Holy War*, passim; Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars*; Kazemi-Moussavi, *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam*; Kazemi-Moussavi, "The Establishment"; Amanat, "From *ijtihad* to *wilayat-i faqih*"; Sachedina, *The Just Ruler*, passim, esp. 139–42, 166; Sachedina, "Activist Shi'ism," esp. 410, 424, 426; Brunner, "Shi'ite Doctrine ii. Hierarchy in the Imamiyya," *Elr* (online); Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, passim, esp. 51, 141–2; Stewart, "An Eleventh-Century Justification"; Rasekh, "Agents of the Imam"; Abada, "The 'Ulamā' of Iran"; MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 11–29, 253–84. On religious authority in Islamic thought, see Afsaruddin, "Authority, religious," *EI*³ (online).
- 45 Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 55: "... since the Imam was in Occultation, and since after the completion of Lesser Occultation and the time of the Four Agents the chances of any regular contact with the Imam were remote, the mainstream learned Shi'ism insisted that the responsibility of guiding believers during this interregnum rested upon the 'ulamā. However, this attitude did not dismiss repeated claims concerning mystical encounters. Part of the literature on Occultation was devoted to these experiences." As we see below, not all Shi'i authors qualify such encounters as "mystical."
- 46 While contextualizing al-Majlisī's *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, Amir Arjomand makes the following cogent argument in his Weberian analysis of Shi'i Islam: "The Shi'ite hierocracy [in the Safavid period], while allowing for the intermittent appearance of the Imam and especially for visits and favors he vouchsafes upon the prominent 'ulamā', and attempting to reserve attenuated forms of contact with the Hidden Imam through dreams and visions as their own prerogative, staunchly opposed any attempt to translate the eschatology into this-worldly millenarianism on the basis of mahdistic and epiphanic claims." Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 162.
- 47 Brunner, "Sleeping Mullahs" and the slightly extended French version of the same article, Brunner, "Le charisma des songeurs," 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."
- 48 MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 13–4.
- 49 Madelung, "Authority in Twelver Shiism," 165: "After [the fourth emissary'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 was one of the first Western scholars to directly mention the issue of contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation.
- 50 Stewart, "An Eleventh-Century Justification," 470: "Regular communication with [the Hidden Imam] is not possible, though believers may see him in visions or dreams or meet him without realizing at the moment that he is in fact the Twelfth Imam." Stewart adds in a footnote, "According to some authorities, the Imam has been seen from time to time and has been in correspondence with others." Cf. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 162: "During the Greater Occultation, direct access to the imam is impossible and one cannot obtain his opinions directly."

find, at least, a reference to the topic of encounters with the Hidden Imam.⁵¹ The only entry in *EI*² other than “Ghayba” that mentions the issue is the article “Ithnā ‘Asharī,” though the author focuses exclusively on the otherworldly interpretations of these accounts highlighted or advanced by Henry Corbin.⁵² Three entries in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* refer to the issue of sightings of the Imam, but again, these entries mention only Corbin’s view of the accounts.⁵³ In fact, Henry Corbin and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi are the only two scholars who have devoted full-length articles to the topic of encounters with the Imam.

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- 51 E.g., the following entries in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*: “Mahdī” (Robert S. Kramer) (Kramer states that the Shī‘a believe the Mahdī to be an “incarnation of God”; this is incorrect); “Ghaybah” (Andrew Newman); “Intizār” (Yann Richard); “Imam” (Imtiyaz Yūsuf); “Shī‘ī Islam” (Syed Husain M. Jafri, et al.); and the following entries by Abdulaziz Sachedina: “Messiansim”; “Imāmah”; and “Ithnā ‘Ashariyah.” The following entries can be found in *EI*²: “Muḥammad al-Kā‘im” (J.G.J. ter Haar); and three by Wilferd Madelung: “al-Mahdī”; “Kā‘im Āl Muḥammad”; and “Imāma.” It is hoped that this lacuna will be filled in the third edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. There is also no mention of the subject in the entries on “Ghayba(t)” (Robert Gleave) in Martin (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Islam and the Modern World*, 1:273–4; the entry on “Mahdi” (Reza Aslan) in Campo (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 447–8; or in the short entry on “Muḥammad al-Qā‘im” in Newby (ed.), *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, 155.
- 52 Nasr makes similar statements in his introductory books about Islam. For example, “[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.” Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*, 72. In Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 112, he suggests, without further explanation, that the Hidden Imam is a 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 al-Khiḍr or the Hidden Imam.” See also Nasr, “Shī‘ism and Sufism,” 232. Cf. Nasr, *Islam in the Modern World*, 116, where he defines *ghayba* as the Imam having “concealed [himself] from the gaze of the outward world.” In a more recent work, Nasr states that “there are many Persian Shī‘ite mystics, although not by any means all, who have claimed that they have had no human master but that their master has been the Twelfth Imam.” Elsewhere, he singles out Baḥr al-‘Ulūm and ‘Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī as being among a hidden chain of Shī‘ī ulama who were aided by the Hidden Imam. Nasr, *In Search of the Sacred*, 104, 280. Nasr’s view has been cited in numerous books on Shī‘ism. See, for example, D’Souza, *Shia Women*, 6; and Pandya, *Muslim Women*, 11, who goes on to say that the Shī‘a believe that the twelfth Imam is “in a supernatural realm.”
- 53 See “Shiism: Ithnā ‘Ashariyah” (by Seyyed Hossein Nasr); “Ghaybah” (by Douglas S. Crow); and “Spiritual Guide” (by Stuart W. Smithers). Cf. the following comment in the entry “Ghayba” by Jamel Velji in Campo (ed.), *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.”

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 on the topic 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 on the Hidden Imam in Arabic and Persian that include stories of those who met the Imam. In the first of three interrelated studies on the subject, "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 Hamadan who encountered the Imam in the desert near Mecca and was miraculously transported back to his home in Iran.⁵⁴ A condensed version of these accounts is included in the chapter "Mundus Imaginalis."⁵⁵ The three accounts were later republished in the fourth volume of his magnum opus, *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, to which he appended the translation of a fourth account—the now famous encounter between the Hidden Imam and the legendary figure al-Khiḍr at the mosque of Jamkarān outside Qum. In addition, he included details of his own "pilgrimage" to this site with Seyyed Hossein Nasr in 1962.⁵⁶ Corbin's translations of these accounts are the first of their kind in any European language, though they are perhaps better described as adaptations than word-for-word renditions.

Corbin frequently uses interpretative license in *En Islam iranien*. 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, in places it is impossible to determine if one is reading the original text or Corbin's interpretations. 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.⁵⁷

In the opinion of Corbin, the accounts describing meetings with the Imam were a fecund field of mystical speculation. They seemed to describe events that transpired in the physical world, but Corbin averred that the encounters took place in "un monde qui reste au-delà du contrôle empirique de nos sens et

54 Corbin, "Au Pays de l'Imām caché," 31–87.

55 This chapter was published in Corbin's *Face de Dieu, face de l'homme*. For an English translation, see Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis" (trans. Fox).

56 Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4:338–9. For Nasr's account of this visit, see Nasr, *In Search of the Sacred*, 98.

57 On the *'ālam al-mithāl*, see chapter 2.

de nos sciences rationnelles.”⁵⁸ Elsewhere, he maintains that the Hidden Imam is “a supernatural being” who “does not appear and disappear according to the laws of material historicity.”⁵⁹

A firm belief in this metahistorical reality of the Hidden Imam is wedded to a deep interest in symbolism. Corbin nurtures both throughout his writings on the Hidden Imam. In the three above-mentioned studies, his approach is characterized by a certain sanguineness: the Hidden Imam “dwells on the Green Island in the middle of the Sea of Whiteness,”⁶⁰ he is “hidden between Heaven and Earth in the *‘alam al-mithāl*,”⁶¹ and can only be encountered in this realm of the simulacra, a realm with a reality and topography that transcends the limits of the empirical world. The gate to this realm was the phenomena of dreams, metaphysical visions, and other intuitive experiences. Ever the enthusiastic and imaginative reader, Corbin maintains that visions were the portal to the realm of the Hidden Imam:

For more than ten centuries the figure of the Hidden Imam dominate[d] all Shi‘ite religious consciousness For more than ten centuries ... 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.⁶²

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

58 Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4:376.

59 Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (trans. Sherrard), 71 [= Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, 110].

60 Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 56. On the story of the Green Island, see Ghaemmaghami, “To the Abode of the Hidden One.”

61 Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 81.

62 Corbin, “Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality,” 405. This reading is also posited by Hossein Ziai, “Dreams ii: In the Persian Tradition,” *Elr*, 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.” On Islamic oneirology, see the bibliography in Kinberg, “Dreams,” *Elr*³ (online).

de la *ghaybat*, puisqu'elles se passent justement dans cet "entre-temps" [that is, 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 shī'ites⁶³

Throughout Corbin's studies on the Hidden Imam, the reader cannot help but sense a feeling of urgency. Corbin was affected by the West's rejection of the imaginal realm and suppression of the nature and reality of the Unseen.⁶⁴ In the narrative (*hikāya*) of the Hidden Imam, including the accounts of encounters with him, he saw a hierohistory: "it is a history of *real* events, but it is not a reality open to critical history."⁶⁵ 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. For this reason, Corbin was especially attracted to the founder and leaders of the Shaykhī movement who nurtured the mode of the invisible presence of the Imam in the imaginal realm.⁶⁶

Amir-Moezzi followed the interpretative trajectory laid out by Corbin in his (Amir-Moezzi's) studies of the encounter narratives. In "Contribution à la Typologie des Rencontres avec l'Imām Caché,"⁶⁷ he set out to fulfill a wish Corbin expressed in his *En Islam iranien*,⁶⁸ namely, to categorize the accounts of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation. In this article, Amir-Moezzi introduces a three-part typology based on the role and function of the Hidden Imam in the encounter: humanitarian, initiatory, and eschatological.⁶⁹ The five accounts from the Greater Occultation he briefly summarizes and classifies under the humanitarian category are those in which the Imam comes to the aid of a desperate believer, for example, by healing him of an incurable illness or saving him from being lost in the desert. He classifies six

63 Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4:330. See also Corbin, "Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality," 406.

64 See Corbin, *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste*, 20 [= Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (trans. Pearson), xxi]. For a representative passage lamenting the shortcomings of Western civilization, see Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 1:8–9.

65 Corbin, "Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality," 405.

66 See Amir-Moezzi, "Une absence remplie de présences."

67 For an English translation of this article, see Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam*, 431–60.

68 Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4:330: "il y aurait à en opérer le classement typologique."

69 Amir-Moezzi, "Contribution à la Typologie," 110. Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le shī'isme?*, 118–21 [= Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *What is Shi'i Islam?* (trans. Casler and Ormsby), 63–4].

accounts under the rubric of initiatory, those in which the Imam reveals certain spiritual knowledge or teaches a specific prayer to his initiate. He then introduces the eschatological dimension by which an encounter with the Hidden Imam “prompts a believer’s spiritual resurrection.”⁷⁰ According to Amir-Moezzi, the eschatological dimension interested “mystics, theologians, and Imami sufis, who meditated and developed these traditions.”⁷¹

Amir-Moezzi does not mention any specific accounts in this third section. Instead, he discusses the spiritual hermeneutics of some of the accounts offered by masters of the Shaykhī movement and the Dhahabī and Khāksārī Shī‘ī Sufi orders.⁷² These masters 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.”⁷³

Amir-Moezzi’s article on the symbolic and theological hermeneutics of the occultation provided by the masters of the Shaykhīyya elucidates this third dimension.⁷⁴ According to this perspective, only through interpretation is one able to perceive the colorful and profound metaphors dormant and latent in the stories. Amir-Moezzi’s concern for the initiatic component of these narratives is perhaps best illustrated by an article he wrote, describing his own pilgrimage to the mosque of the Hidden Imam in Jamkarān.⁷⁵

70 Amir-Moezzi, “Islam in Iran vii: The Concept of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi‘ism,” *EI*r, 14:140.

71 Amir-Moezzi, “Eschatology iii: In Imami Shi‘ism,” *EI*r, 8:579.

72 On the Dhahabī order, see van den Bos, “Dhahabiyya,” *EI*r³ (online). On the Shaykhī movement, see Hermann, “Shaykhism,” *EI*r (online).

73 Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 132. See also Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *Qu’est-ce que le shī‘isme?*, 118 [= Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *What is Shi‘i Islam?* (trans. Casler and Ormsby), 63].

74 Amir-Moezzi, “Une absence remplie de présences.” For an English translation of this article, see Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam*, 461–86.

75 Since the account features some of the elements, devices, and topoi found in some other stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam, especially the story of the Green Island in the White Sea, it is useful to provide a summary. Amir-Moezzi recounts that, in 1973, he was summoned by his paternal great-uncle who, when he was dying, revealed that fifty years earlier, he 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 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. Then suddenly, 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

The contributions of Corbin and Amir-Moezzi have helped illuminate the function of the guide-initiate relationship in Shīʿī Islam. In the estimation of many among the sampling of scholars and mystics whom Corbin and Amir-Moezzi 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.”⁷⁶ While this approach is useful in discussing mystical speculations in Shīʿī Islam, such as those advanced by some modern (post-1800) thinkers, it would be an overgeneralization to apply it to the entire corpus of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam. For example, the main source for most of the narratives Corbin and Amir-Moezzi discuss or mention in passing was the hadith specialist (*muḥaddith*) Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1902). It is important to note that al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, in emphasizing the issue of authority, declares that Shīʿī mystics are inimical to the Imams and rejects any attempt to situate the stories of encounters he collected and published in any realm but the physical; to wit, he dismisses the approach of mystics, theosophists,

of his life, he summoned his great-great-nephew to ask him to travel there and attempt to discover the secret. Arriving in Jamkarān, Amir-Moezzi met with the same guide, now advanced in age. Each time he attempted to raise the question of the hidden city in the subterranean realm, his host politely changed the subject to matters of theology, philosophy, and the secret meanings latent in the Quran 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 Jamkarān, 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 visit 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 ... then the driver woke him. It was Wednesday. He had entered Jamkarān on Sunday. Returning to Tehran, he learned that his family had not heard from him in four days. His great-great-uncle had passed away that Monday. A postscript provided details of Amir-Moezzi’s second visit to Jamkarān in 1995. The place was hardly recognizable. What was once a hamlet had suddenly become a small town. A highway had been built circumventing Qum and connecting Jamkarān directly to the Iranian capital. Each Wednesday, thousands of pilgrims arrived in chartered buses. The sanctuary of the Hidden Imam has been renovated. Jamkarān now features several new mosques, travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, and publishing houses. Informed sources told him that an apolitical and eschatological cadre of ulama that is opposed to the ideals of the Islamic revolution has succeeded in promoting Jamkarān as a holy city, to compete with Qum and Mashhad. Amir-Moezzi, “Jamkarān et Māhān,” 154–67.

76 Corbin, “Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality,” 386.

and others interested in esoteric interpretation (*ahl-i ta'wīl*) who speak of the imaginal world (*'ālam-i mithāl*) or abodes of the heart (*manāzil-i qalbīyyih*).⁷⁷

2 Outline of the Book

Building on previous scholarship, this book raises new questions and concerns. I focus chiefly, though not exclusively, on the genesis and evolution of encounters with the Hidden Imam in the early and premodern period, focusing largely on roughly the first three hundred and fifty years of the Greater Occultation (circa 329/941 to the end of the seventh/thirteenth century). By adopting this focus, I hope this book will fill several gaps in scholarship, present new research on an underappreciated aspect and critical phase of Shī'ī intellectual history and piety, and lay the groundwork for further study of the issue, in particular in the modern and contemporary periods.

The first two chapters offer a textual study of the early hadith corpus on the question of seeing the Hidden Imam. Chapter 1 serves as a background. I examine the earliest extant Shī'ī sources that address the *ghayba* of the final Imam during the period known as the Lesser or Lesser Occultation. While this period has been closely studied by scholars, this chapter addresses a gap in the scholarship by isolating and analyzing the few references to the *ghayba* in the earliest surviving Quran commentaries and hadith works, and by investigating what these sources say (or neglect to say) on the issue of seeing the Hidden Imam. I will show that the overwhelming majority of hadiths affirm that the Imam cannot be seen or recognized by anyone during the *ghayba*, while a small number of hadiths suggest that he can be seen though not recognized as the Hidden Imam.

Considering the authority invested in hadith literature,⁷⁸ and in light of the fact that the majority of hadiths affirm that the Hidden Imam cannot be seen during his absence, a question emerges: on what scriptural basis do Shī'ī ulama record and transmit the accounts of those who have alleged to have seen and spoken with the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation? Chapter 2

77 Al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:624–5. On the history of anti-Sufi rhetoric among Shī'ī ulama, see Pourjavady, “Opposition to Sufism in Twelver Shī'ism,” 614–23; Rizvi, “The *Takfīr*”; and in particular during the Qajar period, Bayat, “Anti-Sufism in Qajar Iran,” 624–38.

78 On Shī'ī hadith, see Kohlberg, “Shī'ī *Hadith*”; Ahmad, “Twelver Šī'ī *ḥadīth*”; Kazemi-Moussavi, “Hadith ii. In Shi'ism,” *ELr*, 11:447–9; Brunner, “The Role of *Ḥadīth*.” For important insights on the function of hadith as both narrative fiction and religious text, see Günther, “Fictional Narration and Imagination.”

focuses on three hadiths that are cited by some later ulama, as these hadith leave open the possibility of a special cadre of believers that can encounter (and recognize) the Imam during this second *ghayba*. I gloss and contextualize the key words found in these hadiths and probe the ways in which they have been interpreted and negotiated by Shī'ī ulama and Western scholars who have commented on them.

In chapter 3, I focus on the first two critical centuries of the Greater Occultation. A noticeable shift can be discerned between the tradition-oriented ulama who wrote in the early years of the Greater Occultation and the rationalist-oriented scholars who followed them vis-à-vis the possibility of seeing the Imam. The traditionists argued that the Imam can no longer be seen or encountered physically by anyone. The *locus classicus* for proscribing the possibility of seeing him in the second *ghayba* was the final *tawqī'ī* of the Hidden Imam, referred to above. I show that the rationalist scholars slowly, if cautiously, acceded to the possibility of encountering the Imam, although they abstained from mentioning anyone who had, in actuality, met him. These findings amend the assumption that stories of encounters with the Imam in a wakeful state have existed and occurred from the beginning of the Greater Occultation.

Finally, in chapter 4, I examine the earliest known and surviving accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam. The tacit approval of the rationalist-oriented scholars, discussed in chapter 3, of the possibility of seeing the Imam served as the nucleus for another critical shift. In the following two centuries, accounts of encounters and contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, albeit rare and infrequent, began to appear in the works of Shī'ī authorities. Near the end of this chapter, I will show that while, in the next centuries, the accounts of encounters remained few in number and were consistent in their representation of the Hidden Imam, in the Safavid period they increased and became far more embellished. I propose that this development is linked to a critical gloss of the final *tawqī'ī*, a gloss that adumbrated 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 in the Greater Occultation.

The Unknown, the Unseen, and the Unrecognized

In this chapter, I examine Imāmī Shīʿī hadith compilations and Quran commentaries (*tafsīr*) produced in the period later known as the Lesser or Minor Occultation. I isolate a number of passages from these works that discuss the *ghayba* of the twelfth and final Imam, and in particular, the question of contacting and seeing this figure.

1 The Hadith Compilations Attributed to al-Barqī and al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī

At the outset, it must be said that the two earliest surviving Imāmī Shīʿī hadith collections, both compiled by scholars who lived during the early years of the occultation of the Hidden Imam, are decidedly un-messianic. There are no references to the *ghayba* in *Kitāb al-Maḥāsīn* attributed to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khālīd al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893), an absence to which Kohlberg first brought attention, or in *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, attributed to Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–3).¹ Amir-Moezzi found it “plus complexe et plus troublant” that the latter contains only five hadiths (of 1,881) that refer to there being twelve Imams.² His observation lends further credence to the notion that most Shīʿa knew nothing about the Hidden Imam during the crisis of mass confusion, uncertainty, helpless, loss, and perplexity (*ḥayra*) that erupted after the death of the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/

1 Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya,” 523. This absence is emphasized in Amir-Moezzi, “al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī,” 240; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 249 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 101]; Amir-Moezzi, “Islam in Iran vii,” *Elr*, 14:137; Newman, *The Formative Period*, 59; Viložny, “Pre-Būyid *Ḥadīth* Literature,” 207. On al-Barqī and *Kitāb al-Maḥāsīn*, see Viložny, *Constructing a Worldview*; Newman, *The Formative Period*, 51–9; Kohlberg, “Imam and Community,” 39; Viložny, “Pre-Būyid *Ḥadīth* Literature”; Ansari, “al-Barqī,” 110. On al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī and the question of the attribution of *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt* to him, see Amir-Moezzi, “al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī,” 221–50 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qurʾān & the Speaking Qurʾān*, 97–124]; Anṣārī, “Tabārshināsi-i kitāb-i baṣāʾir al-darajāt va huviyyat-i nivisandih-yi ān.”

2 Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 249 n. 537, states that five out of 1,881 hadiths “équivalent à un silence presque total.” Cf. Amir-Moezzi, “al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī,” 237, 241 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qurʾān & the Speaking Qurʾān*, 111, 114]. See also Newman, *The Formative Period*, 84–5; Momen, *Shiʿi Islam*, 62–3.

874).³ Indeed, the five hadiths in *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt* that do refer to there being twelve Imams do not hint at the notion of *ghayba* or suggest that the twelfth Imam is the messianic Mahdī or Qāʾim.⁴

The twenty-second chapter of *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, titled “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 ‘Alī before he died,” does feature two hadiths that are intriguing but have been neglected for the most part in academic literature. These two hadiths anticipate the appearance of a prophet (*nabī*) after Muḥammad and the line of Imams.⁵ The first was transmitted by the sixth Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765),⁶ and is a *ḥadīth qudsī* (divine saying; lit., sacred or holy hadith) in the sense that the words are attributed to God:

I never leave the earth bereft of a *walī* [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 and the coming forth of the next Prophet (*bayna qabḍ al-nabī ilā khurūj al-nabī l-ākhar*).⁷

The second hadith (the fourth and final hadith found in the same chapter) is similar, only here the words are attributed to the angel Gabriel and the definite article on the word *nabī* has been omitted to make the meaning more generic: “between the passing of a prophet and the coming forth of another

3 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*.

4 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 280 (hadith no. 15), in which the Prophet commands Abū Bakr to believe in ‘Alī and eleven of his descendants who the Prophet says “are like me except that they are not prophets”, 319–20 (nos. 2, 4, 5), and 372 (no. 16). Cf. another hadith where all twelve Imams are called *mahdīs*. Amir-Moezzi, “al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī,” 240 n. 48.

5 On early objections to the understanding that Muḥammad was the “seal of the prophets” (Quran 33:40) and the final bearer of revelation, see van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 1:29–32 [= van Ess, *Theology and Society*, 1:34–7]; Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, 70.

6 On him, see Robert Gleave and et al., “Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq,” *Elr*, 14:349–66; Crow, “Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and the Elaboration of Shiʿism.”

7 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 468 (no. 1). While the word *nabī* is usually translated as prophet, its relationship with the word *nabaʾ* (“news”) and the locution *al-nabaʾ al-ʿazīm* (“the great news” or “the great announcement”) of Quran 78:2, usually defined by Quran exegetes as the Day of Resurrection, suggests that a second and perhaps more precise meaning of *nabī* is one who foretells the coming of the Day of Resurrection.

(prophet)" (*bayna qabḍ nabī ilā khurūj ākhar*).⁸ Both hadiths, and in particular the first, suggest that after Muḥammad an Imam will always be present until the next prophet is raised by God.⁹ As is the case with all other hadiths found in *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, these hadiths do not mention or intimate that any of the Imams who will appear before the appearance of the next prophet will be concealed.

Furthermore, if by "the next prophet" is meant the Qā'im, who, according to other Shī'ī hadiths, will introduce a new *amr*, a new book, a new sovereignty (*sultān*), and new laws (*aḥkāṃ*)—which according to Amir-Moezzi, "seems to indicate a new religion abrogating Islam"¹⁰—then these two hadiths appear to support a notion about the Qā'im that is implied throughout Imāmī/Twelve

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- 8 Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, 469–70 (no. 4). On early Shī'ī sources defining the term "proof [of God]" (*ḥujjat*) as a designation of all the Imams and in particular an epithet of the twelfth Imam, see Dakake, "Ḥojjat," *Elr*, 12:424–6; Arastu (trans.), *al-Nudbah*, 112 n. 3; Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), index, s.v. "ḥujja, ḥujaj (proof)." On the class of hadiths known as *ḥadīth qudsī*, see Robson, "Ḥadīth Quḍsī," *EI*², 8:28–9; Algar, "Hadith iv. In Sufism," *Elr*, 11:451–3. Graham devotes a few paragraphs to discussing the presence of *aḥādīth qudsīyya* in the later Shī'ī hadith collection of al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1104/1693) while admitting that a study of *aḥādīth qudsīyya* in Shī'ī hadith collections is outside the scope of his monograph and merits a separate survey. Graham, *Divine Word*, 67–8.
- 9 Cf. a hadith stating 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 (*ḥalāl*) 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, *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, 484.
- 10 Amir-Moezzi, "Eschatology iii: In Imami Shi'ism," *Elr*, 8:577. Cf. the following comment by Amanat, "Islam in Iran v.," 14:131, presumably based 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 Shi'ite literature)." Henry Corbin read the same hadiths differently: "... the Parousia of the Twelfth Imām is not that the Twelfth Imām must bring a new Book, a new *shar'at*. That would not at all be the advent of *ta'wīl*; 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." Corbin, "Youthfulness and Chivalry," 71 (trans. Rhone) [= Corbin, *L'Homme et son ange*, 231–2]. Kohlberg, "Authoritative Scriptures," 310–11, expresses a similar opinion: "In some eschatological traditions 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."

Shī'ī works and spoken of directly in Ismā'īlī sources, namely, that the Qā'im is prophet-like, if not a prophet himself.¹¹

The term *amr* warrants a comment. It is often difficult to translate *amr* (lit., command, order, cause, affair) in the Quran and in Shī'ī hadiths because of the multifarious uses of this word. In Shī'ī sources, various Imams are called the possessor (*ṣāhib*) of the *amr*.¹² In hadiths about the Qā'im, *amr* has eschatological and apocalyptic connotations. In certain hadiths, the Quranic *amr* is the Qā'im. The *amr* of God mentioned in the opening verse of Sūrat al-Naḥl (Quran 16:1), "The *amr* of God cometh; so seek not to hasten it," is interpreted by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq as being "our *amr*, meaning the rise of our *qā'im* (*huwa amrunā ya'nī qiyām al-qā'im*), [the one who will rise from] the family of Muḥammad."¹³ Based on this and other hadiths, the exegete Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Lāhijī (fl. eleventh/seventeenth century) avers that what is meant by (*murād*) *amr Allāh* throughout the Quran is the Qā'im.¹⁴

In a related hadith, one of al-Bāqir's disciples says, "I asked (Imam al-Bāqir) about this *amr*, when will he appear?"¹⁵ 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."¹⁶ Al-Qummī defines the coming *amr* of God in Quran 16:33 as the coming forth (*khurūj*) of the Qā'im.¹⁷ According to a more frequently cited hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq, the Qā'im will appear with an entirely new *amr*.¹⁸ A slightly different variation of this hadith is found in al-Sayyārī.¹⁹ Another hadith, also attributed to al-Ṣādiq, states that the Qā'im will call people to *islām* anew while guiding them to

11 This interpretation is advanced by Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 201–2, based on his study of Twelver Shī'ī hadiths: "... in Shī'ī traditions the only available explanation of the constant comparison with prophets is that the Mahdi 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 fourth-/tenth-century Ismā'īlī sources, see Ghaemmaghani, "{And the Earth will Shine with the Light of its Lord}" (Q 39:69)." See also Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 226; Crone, *The Nativist Prophets*, 465.

12 Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, 175, 435.

13 Al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl al-āyāt*, 1:252; al-'Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr*, 73; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī l-maw'ūd*, 137. Cf. al-Majlisī, *Kitāb-i raj'at*, 173.

14 Al-Lāhijī, *Tafsīr-i Sharīf Lāhijī*, 2:694.

15 [= *sa'altu Abā Ja'far 'an al-amr māta yakūnu*]

16 [= *in kuntum tu'ammilūna an yajī'akum min wajhin thumma jā'akum min wajhin fa-lā tunkirūnahu*] Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra'*, 94.

17 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:385. *Khurūj* can also be understood as referring to the uprising/rebellion of the Qā'im against the forces of darkness.

18 [= *jā'a bi-amrin ḡayr alladhī kāna*] Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:536 (no. 2).

19 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt*, 106.

a forgotten *amr*, from which the people have strayed.²⁰ Other hadiths appear to equate *amr* with *dīn* (= religion, but also belief in the unity of God; pious fear of God; a custom, habit, way, mode, manner of conduct, or the like).²¹ For example, in a passage excerpted by his student al-Murtaḍā, al-Mufīd refers to a hadith saying that the Qā'im has been so-called "because he will proclaim a *dīn* that has been effaced (*yaqūm bi-dīnin qad indarasa*), manifest a truth that was hidden (*yuzhir bi-ḥaqqin kāna makhfīyyan*), and fearlessly rise through the power of Truth/God."²² Moreover, the first part of Quran 5:64, "The Jews said, 'The hand of God is chained up,'" is interpreted by the eighth Imam, 'Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818), as intending to say, "(The Jews) meant that God has brought the *amr* to an end and will not bring forth a new thing again ... He will not add anything to (the *amr*)."²³ That is, the Jews believed that the *amr* of God brought to them by Moses was the only *amr* and that God would never raise a prophet with a new *amr* again. I prefer Lawson and Amanat's translation of *amr* as "the divine cause,"²⁴ though some other translations offered by scholars are also useful. Cook, for example, suggests translating *amr* in messianic and apocalyptic Shī'ī hadiths as "the End," "a new revelation or messianic system of government," or "revelation, period or dispensation."²⁵ Clarke translates *amr jadīd* in a Shī'ī hadith about the Qā'im as "a new rule (*amr*, political order)."²⁶ Similarly, Sachedina and Amir-Moezzi render *amr jadīd* as "a new order."²⁷ The term was also used by the early Fatimids, especially as part of a title also found in Imāmī/Twelve sources, *ṣāhib* (master, lord, and possessor of) *al-amr*.²⁸

20 [= *wa-hadāhum ilā amrin qad duthira fa-ḍalla 'anhu al-jumhūr*] Al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād fī ma'rifat ḥujaj Allāh 'alā l-'ibād*, 2:383.

21 See Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:944.

22 Al-Murtaḍā [al-Mufīd], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 322.

23 [= *ya'nūna anna Allāh ta'ālā qad faragha min al-amr fa-laysa yuḥdith shay'an ... fa-laysa yazīd fīhi shay'an*] Al-Ṣadūq, *'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, 1:182, 189.

24 Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam*, index, s.v. "divine cause (*al-amr*)"; Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 252 (here, Amanat translates *amru'llāh* as "Divine cause"); Lawson, "Interpretation as Revelation," 250.

25 Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 195, 199, 232–3.

26 Clarke, "The Rise and Decline of *Taqīyya*," 50.

27 Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 175; Amir-Moezzi, "Eschatology iii: In Imami Shi'ism," *Elr*, 8:577. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, "Muḥammad le Paraclét et 'Alī le Messie," 21. See also Mir-Kasimov, "Takfir and Messianism," 192.

28 Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdī*, 69, 76; Mahdī-Ḥā'irī, "Ṣāhib al-zamān," *DMT*, 10:239–40. See also Baljon, "The 'Amr of God' in the Koran"; Momen, "A Study of the Meaning"; an interesting usage drawn attention to in Kister, "'A Booth Like the Booth of Moses ...' A Study of an Early *Ḥadīth*"; and the related interpretation of *amr* in Sunnī works of *kalām*, where it appears as a particular revelation of God's will and the providential rule of creation through His command and decrees. Schwarb, "Amr," *Elr*³ (online).

2 The Exegetical Corpus: The *tafsīr* of al-‘Askarī, al-Sayyārī, al-Furāt, al-Qummī, and al-‘Ayyāshī

In their search for references to the twelfth Imam and the notion of *ghayba*, scholars have mined the three major hadith compilations—namely, al-Qummī’s *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, al-Barqī’s *Kitāb al-Mahāsīn*, and al-Kulaynī’s (d. 328–9/940–1) *al-Kāfī*—and the two Shī‘ī heresiographical works—namely, al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī’s (d. between 300/912–3 and 310/922–3) *Kitāb Firaq al-Shī‘a*²⁹ and Sa‘d b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī’s (d. 299/911–2 or 301/913–4) *Kitāb al-Maqālāt wa-l-firaq*³⁰—that have survived from the period that came to be called the Minor or Lesser Occultation. However, a similar study has not yet been undertaken for the earliest surviving Shī‘ī Quran commentaries, all of which likewise date from the Lesser Occultation, or just before. In order to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the early sources and what information they may contain about the Imam’s *ghayba* in general and the question of contact with the Hidden Imam in particular, it is imperative to consider these commentaries as well.³¹

Of the 379 hadiths that make up the partial *tafsīr* ascribed to the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, only one hadith mentions the *ghayba* of the Qā‘im. This hadith is narrated on the authority of al-‘Askarī’s father, the tenth Imam, ‘Alī al-Hādī (d. 254/868):³²

Were it not for the learned (*‘ulamā’*) who will live after the *ghayba* of your Qā‘im, who invite [people] to [his cause], guide [them] to him, defend his *dīn* with the proofs of God, save the weak (*du‘afā’*) among God’s servants from the temptations of Iblīs and his evil spirits (cf. Quran 37:7) and the

29 On al-Nawbakhtī and his *Firaq al-Shī‘a*, see Iqbāl, *Khāndān-i Nawbakhtī*, 125–65; van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere*, 219–60; Pingree, “Nawbakhtī, Ḥasan,” *Elr* (online); Anthony, “Nawbakhtī Family,” *Elr* (online); Kraemer, “al-Nawbakhtī, al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā,” *EI*², 7:1044; Anṣārī, “Abū Sahl Nawbakhtī,” *DMB*, 5:579–83; Madelung, “Imāmism and Mu‘tazilite Theology,” 14–16; Ḥā‘irī, “Ḥasan bin Mūsā,” *DMT*, 6:306; Rashed, *Al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī*, 341–91, especially 383–4.

30 On al-Qummī and his *Kitāb al-Maqālāt wa-l-firaq*, see van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere*, 260–9; Kohlberg, “Early Attestations,” 343. For a comparison of the works of al-Nawbakhtī and al-Qummī, see Madelung “Bemerkungen zur imāmitischen Firaq-Literature,” 37–52.

31 On Shī‘ī Quran commentaries produced in this period, see Gordon, “Obeying Those in Authority,” 72–80; Ardehali, “The Formation of Classical Imāmi Exegesis,” 104–14; and other sources cited below.

32 On the tenth Imam, see Madelung, “‘Alī al-Hādī,” *Elr*, 1:861–2; Bernheimer, “‘Alī al-Hādī,” *Elr*³ (online). On the eleventh Imam, see Halm, “‘Askarī, Ḥasan b. ‘Alī” *Elr*, 2:769.

snares of those who are hostile toward the Shī'a (*al-nawāṣib*), [then] every person would renounce [their] faith in God.³³

Bar-Asher has suggested, from internal evidence, that the *tafsīr* ascribed to al-'Askarī was likely composed during his lifetime, though he is not prepared to attribute the work directly to al-'Askarī.³⁴ The fact that only one hadith out of 379 mentions the *ghayba* amounts to a near complete silence on the issue and further supports Bar-Asher's thesis that the work was composed during the lifetime of the eleventh Imam. It is also possible that the above hadith, or at least the phrase "the *ghayba* of your Qā'im," was added to the work during or after the period that came to be known as the Minor Occultation.

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī's (fl. third/ninth century) *Kitāb al-Tanzīl wa-l-taḥrīf* (or simply, *al-Tafsīr*), a work on variant readings of the Quran, contains numerous references to the Qā'im (though not to the Mahdī)³⁵ but never mentions the notion of *ghayba* or alludes to the possibility of contact with the Hidden Imam.³⁶ Perhaps in an attempt to link al-Sayyārī to the Hidden Imam

33 Al-'Askarī (attrib.), *al-Tafsīr al-mansūb*, 344–5 (no. 225). Cf. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 2:6 (no. 12), where the oddly sounding "your Qā'im" (which might be a strange thing for an Imam to say) is rendered as "our Qā'im." Hadiths of this type that divide the Shī'a into two distinct categories—the learned (*'ulamā'*) and the weak (*du'afā'*)—are common in the *tafsīr* attributed to al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī. See Kohlberg, "Imam and Community," 41–3.

34 Bar-Asher, "The Qur'ān Commentary," 379. Cf. the formidable study by Muḥammad Taqī al-Tustarī (d. 1995) who contests that any attempt to attribute this *tafsīr* to al-'Askarī amounts to slander (*buhtān*) and argues that many of the hadiths found in this work are fabricated. Al-Tustarī, *al-Akhhbār al-dakhīla*, 152–228. See also Luṭfi, "Tafsīr-i Imām Ḥasan 'Askarī," *DMBI* (online).

35 On more than one occasion in the introduction and notes to their critical edition of al-Sayyārī's *Kitāb al-Tanzīl wa-l-taḥrīf*, Amir-Moezzi and Kohlberg state that the terms Qā'im and *ṣāḥib hādihā l-amr* refer to the Mahdī, giving the impression that the title "al-Mahdī," with messianic connotations, was used by al-Sayyārī in speaking about the Qā'im. Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, "Introduction," 40, 92–3. However, al-Sayyārī's work does not mention the title "al-Mahdī" with messianic connotations. This absence 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*, 147, who cites a hadith from al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi* that identifies the twelfth Imam as the Mahdī; however, al-Kulaynī's work is slightly later than the period discussed by Sachedina. Since the bulk of the sources used for this book are from the period after al-Kulaynī, when the appellations Mahdī and Qā'im are used interchangeably, these terms are likewise used interchangeably in this book. On the term Qā'im, see also Madelung, "Kā'im Āl Muḥammad," *EI*², 4:456–7.

36 Not surprisingly, there are also no references to the *ghayba* or to the Hidden Imam in the

or compensate for the lack of any reference in his work to the notion of *ghayba*, some sources attribute the report of an account of a miracle performed by the Hidden Imam, soon after he was born, to al-Sayyārī.³⁷

Another Quran commentary produced in the same period is the incomplete *tafsīr* of Furāt b. Furāt Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī (fl. late third/ninth century).³⁸ While al-Kūfī cites numerous hadiths that mention the Mahdī,³⁹ he makes only one reference to the *ghayba* of the Imam: In a hadith without an *isnād*, the Prophet Muḥammad foretells the coming of “the concealed one who will appear after a lengthy *ghayba*.”⁴⁰ 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-maʿthūr* (commentary based on other portions of the Quran or on hadiths and other transmitted reports), as opposed to a *tafsīr bi-l-raʾy* (commentary based on exercising one’s independent rational faculty to form an opinion about the interpretation of a verse).

The case of the *tafsīr* ascribed to ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (fl. fourth/tenth century)⁴¹ is somewhat different. While the author of this work transmits numerous hadiths about the apocalypse, including hadiths about the appearance of the Qā’im,⁴² he makes only three references to the *ghayba*.⁴³ First, under his commentary for Quran 28:5, Moses’s fright and concealment are interpreted as prefigurations of the Qā’im’s *ghayba*, escape, and concealment.⁴⁴

Zaydī Shīʿī *tafsīr* of al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥakam al-Ḥibārī (d. 286/899–900). On this work and its author, see al-Ḥibārī, *Tafsīr al-Ḥibārī*, 17–74; 75–216 (from the introduction by al-Jalālī); Lawson, “Exegesis vi.,” *Elr*, 9:124; Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant*; Amir-Moezzi, “Le Tafsīr d’al-Ḥibārī (m. 286/899).”

- 37 For the sources of this account, see Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, “Introduction,” 33, n. 158.
- 38 On him, see Bar-Asher, “Forāt b. Ebrāhīm,” *Elr*, 10:82; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 29–31; Amir-Moezzi, “Furāt b. Furāt al-al-Kūfī,” *ET*³ (online); Hamza, Rizvi, with Mayer (eds.), *An Anthology*, 25–6. On his *tafsīr*, see also Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 341; Ansari, *al-Mutabaqqī min kutub maʿfūda*, 1:15–32.
- 39 For example, al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, 74–5 (no. 48).
- 40 [= *al-ghāʾib al-qādim baʿda ʿūl al-ghayba*] Al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, 267. Also cited in al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, 562; al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, 2:398, 3:444.
- 41 On al-Qummī, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 33–56; Newman, *The Formative Period*, index, s.v. “Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Hāshim al-Qummī”; Hamza, Rizvi, with Mayer (eds.), *An Anthology*, 24–5; Amir-Moezzi, “Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī,” *ET*³ (online).
- 42 See Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 296; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 214.
- 43 Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, xvii, has noted that the “the *Tafsīr* commonly ascribed to ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī is not by that scholar.” Modarressi appears to be alluding to Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭihirānī’s theory that the *tafsīr* was assembled by al-Qummī’s student Abū l-Faḍl al-ʿAbbās. On al-Ṭihirānī’s theory, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 55; Hamza, Rizvi, with Mayer (eds.), *An Anthology*, 25; Haydūs, *Ḥawl tafsīr al-Qummī*.
- 44 [= *ghaybatihī wa-harabihi wa-istitārihi*] Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:134. Also cited in

According to the editor of al-Qummī's *tafsīr*, this sentence is not found in some manuscripts⁴⁵ and may be, in fact, a later addition to the text. The entire hadith is likely of Wāqifi origins (on the Wāqifiyya, see below).

The second reference to the *ghayba* in al-Qummī's *tafsīr* is found under his commentary on Quran 22:45, "How many a city We have destroyed in its evildoing, and now it is fallen down upon its turrets! How many a deserted well, a lofty palace!" In al-Qummī's *tafsīr*, "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."⁴⁶ Al-Qummī contrasts this well with "a lofty palace," which is "a similitude (*mathal*) for the Commander of the Faithful [that is, 'Alī], for [all of] the Imams, and for their excellent virtues which tower above the world."⁴⁷ Curiously, al-Qummī does not identify "the Imam who has vanished" as the son of al-Ḥasan b. al-'Askarī or any other person, perhaps because his identity was already known to his readers, or because he himself did not know. There are also no references to the Imam's emissaries and representatives, to his agents, or to any of the *tawqī'āt* that were said to have been issued by the Imam in al-Qummī's time, which are cited in later works. Significantly, al-Qummī states that now that the Imam is in *ghayba*,

al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4:255; al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*, 4:109. Cf. Hadith cited by al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, 1:64–5, that mentions, in part, that the Mahdi will depart from Medina following the prophetic precedent of Moses, "fearful and vigilant" (Quran 28:18, 21) until he arrives in Mecca" (*khā'if an yataraqqab ḥattā yaqdam Makka*).

45 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:134 n. 1.

46 [= *hiya allatī lā yustasqā minhā wa-huwa al-imām alladhī qad ghāba fa-lā yuqtabas minhu al-'ilm*]

47 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:85. Also cited in al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-ṣāfi*, 3:383; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3:893; al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr nūr al-thaqalayn*, 3:507; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 24:101 (no. 5). On the basis of this hadith, al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 1:93–4 (referred to in Tūnihī, *Maw'ūdnāmih*, 150), lists "the deserted well" as one of the Hidden Imam's epithets. Al-'Āmilī l-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr*, 94, likewise interprets the well as "Alī, 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, *Baṣā'ir al-darājāt*, 505; al-Ṣadūq, *Ma'ānī l-akhbār*, 111 (nos. 1–2); the lofty palace as Muḥammad and the deserted well as 'Alī, Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Tālib*, 3:88 [this interpretation is also found in the early Ismā'īlī work, al-Yaman (attrib.), *Kitāb al-Kashf*, 50 (on this work, see below)]; the lofty palace as 'Alī and the deserted well as Fāṭima and the other Imams on account of their having been deprived of [earthly] sovereignty (*mu'atṭalīn min al-mulk*), al-Ṣadūq, *Ma'ānī l-akhbār*, 111 (no. 3). See also al-Baḥrānī, *al-Hidāya al-Qur'āniyya*, 1:432–5 (nos. 620–7). On the title *amūr al-mu'minīn*, see Marsham, "Commander of the Faithful," *ER*³ (online).

there is no way to receive knowledge (*‘ilm*) from him. Presumably, the *ghayba* of knowledge (*ghaybat al-‘ilm*) is what has made it necessary for him to produce a written commentary on the Quran, something that was not needed when the Imam was present and his knowledge was accessible.⁴⁸

The third and final reference to *ghayba* in al-Qummī’s *tafsīr* is similar to the previous hadith and is found under his comments on Quran 67:30, “Say: Have you considered? If water vanished into the ground, who would bring you running water?” Commenting on this verse, al-Qummī quotes the words of an unnamed Imam: “If your Imam vanishes, who will bring you an Imam like him?”⁴⁹ This hadith is reiterated in al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfi*, al-Nu‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, and al-Ṣādūq’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),⁵⁰ and narrated on the authority of ‘Alī b. Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭā’īnī, showing that it is likely of Wāqifī origin (on al-Baṭā’īnī and the Wāqifiyya, see below). This version in *Kamāl al-dīn* is as follows: “This verse has been revealed about the Qā’im (*nazalat fi l-qā’im*). When your Imam vanishes, you will not know where he is. Who then will bring you an unconcealed Imam?”⁵¹ 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.⁵² What immediately stands out is the fact that the vanished Imam and the unconcealed/manifest Imam appear to be two different figures; this suggests that the hadith originated with the Wāqifī group that believed the Imam had died and would be resurrected in the future as the Qā’im. This belief is represented in several early Shī’ī hadiths that are either omitted in many later works or included and rationalized. Perhaps the most significant of these is a curious hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq stating that the Qā’im will only appear after an interval or break in the series of Imams (*‘alā fatratin min al-a’imma*), that is, after a period of time when there are no Imams, just as the Prophet was raised after a break in the sequence of messengers.⁵³

48 This understanding anticipates the Akhbārī principle that after the *ghayba* of the Imam, the only source of knowledge available to the believers is the hadiths of the Imams.

49 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:379.

50 On him, see Madelung, “al-Bāqer, Abū Ja’far Moḥammad,” *Elr*, 3:725–6.

51 Al-Ṣādūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 305 (no. 3) (all references to *Kamāl al-dīn* are to the Beirut 2004 edition unless otherwise specified); Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*¹, 115–6 (no. 105); al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 158.

52 On the various symbolic meanings of water in Islamic literature, see Zargar, “Water”; Lawson, “Divine Wrath.”

53 [= *kamā anna rasūl Allāh bu’itha ‘alā fatratin min al-rusul*] Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:341 (no. 21); al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 193. Cf. Quran 5:1. A different hadith with the same purport (i.e., that there will be a break or interregnum in the imamate) is categorically rejected in al-

Before concluding the discussion of the Qā'im in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is appropriate to discuss the well-known hadith of al-Khiḍr⁵⁴ which is recorded in al-Qummī's commentary and has received significant attention from Western

Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 596. See also al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153–4), *al-Mīlāl wa-l-nihāl*, 1:171, who, based on earlier sources at his disposal, describes the various Shī'ī sects that split after al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī and states that the eighth sect maintained that (1) al-'Askarī died without issue; (2) those who claimed he had a surviving son were lying and deceitful; (3) it is possible for God to remove (*yarfa'*: lit., to raise; cf. Quran 41:58) the Proof (i.e., the Imam) from the earth when the people are transgressing the sacred law (*li-ma'āshihim*); (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 raising/sending of Muḥammad (*wa-l-arḍ al-yawm bi-lā ḥujja kamā kānat al-fatra qabl ma'ath al-nabī*). Cf. the description of the fourteenth sect of the factions that split after al-'Askarī in al-Ash'arī al-Qummī (d. 299/911–2 or 301/913–4), *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*, 114–5; the eighth sect in al-Nawbakhtī (d. between 300/912–3 and 310/922–3), *Kitāb Firqat al-Shī'a*, 85–6 [= al-Nawbakhtī, *Shī'a Sects* (trans. Kadhim), 159]; and the ninth sect in al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974), *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, 3:313–5, who believed that al-'Askarī did not have a surviving son; rather, after his death, the community entered a period in which there were 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 Ismā'īlī text attributed to Ja'far b. Maṣnūr al-Yaman (attrib.), *Kitāb al-Kashf*, 79, in which *ghayba* is interpreted as the interregnum between two speaker-prophets (*hiya al-fatra allatī takūn bayna al-nāṭiq wa-l-nāṭiq*). The *Kitāb al-Kashf* is a compilation of six pre-Fatimid Ismā'īlī treatises on the interpretation of the Quran. See Madelung, "Das Imamāt," 52–8; Daftary, *Ismā'īlī Literature*, 122. On early Ismā'īlī conceptions of *fatra*, see Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qur'ān*, index, s.v. "fatra"; Hollenberg, "Neoplatonism in Pre-Kirmānian Fāṭimid Doctrine." Cf. Ibn al-'Arabī's (d. 638/1240) intriguing statement that the Mahdī will appear after a long break in the *dīn* (*yakhruj 'alā fatratīn min al-dīn*). Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, 3:327. This passage is cited by Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385) in at least two of his works: Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, 441, and Āmulī, *al-Muqaddamāt*, 236; by [Mullā] Ṣadrā in his *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, 1:560; and by Ṣadrā's student al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī in his hadith compendium, *al-Wāfī*, 2:470, though none of these scholars adds his own comments to the passage. The meaning of this statement by Ibn al-'Arabī is unclear, but it may be related to the sentence that immediately follows, that through the Mahdī God will lay down what has not been laid down in the Quran.

- 54 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:44–5. Al-Khiḍr (or al-Khaḍīr) (lit., "the green man") is the name given to the legendary figure of Islamic lore commonly identified as the anonymous servant of God and spiritual guide who accompanied Moses and his companion (Quran 18:59–81). See Krasnowolska, "Keẓr," *Elr* (online); Renard, "Khaḍīr/Khiḍr," *EQ*, 3:81–4; A.J. Wensinck "al-Khaḍīr (al-Khiḍr)," *ET*², 4:902–5; Franke, *Begegnung mit Khidr*; Halman, *Where the Two Seas Meet*. In Shī'ī works written to prove the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam, stories of al-Khiḍr are often cited as accounts of another holy figure whose life is miraculously prolonged by God and who lives in a perpetual state of concealment. For an analysis of narrative stories about al-Khiḍr that were incorporated into the earliest surviving *ghayba* works, see Yoshida, "Qışaṣ Contribution," 91–104. See also Markwith, "The Eliatic Function in the Islamic Tradition," esp. 62–74; Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel*,

scholars. In an older version of this hadith found in al-Barqī's *Kitāb al-Mahāsīn*, Imam 'Alī (d. 40/661), his son al-Ḥasan (d. 50/670),⁵⁵ and the Prophet's companion, Salmān al-Fārisī (d. 35/655–6 or 36/656–7),⁵⁶ were greeted inside a mosque by a mysterious stranger later identified by 'Alī as "my brother al-Khiḍr." The stranger posed a number of questions to 'Alī, who deflected them to al-Ḥasan in order to test al-Ḥasan's knowledge. Fully satisfied with the responses he received, the stranger turned to 'Alī and bore witness that he ['Alī] was the Prophet's successor (*waṣī*), that al-Ḥasan would in turn succeed him, followed by the other Imams "until he came to the last of them (*ḥatta atā 'alā ākhirihim*)."⁵⁷ Some scholars have suggested that this hadith, as found in al-Qummī's *tafsīr*, is the earliest text in which *the names* of all twelve Imams are mentioned.⁵⁸ Yet, as Amir-Arjomand points out, the hadith that occurs in al-Qummī's *tafsīr* does not mention the name of the twelfth Imam,⁵⁹ nor does it suggest that he will have a *ghayba*. It does not even explicitly say that the Qā'im is the son of the eleventh Imam. The precise wording is that the successor of al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī (al-'Askarī, the eleventh Imam) is the eagerly awaited (*al-muntaẓar*) Qā'im who will fill the earth with justice and equity.⁶⁰ The name of the twelfth Imam is not mentioned in this hadith or in any of the extant sources before al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*.

Finally, in Abū l-Naḍr Muḥammad al-'Ayyāshī's (fl. late third/ninth to mid-fourth/tenth century)⁶¹ *tafsīr*, the extant copy of which covers the first eighteen suras of the Quran,⁶² there are only two references to the *ghayba*. The first

122; Corbin, "Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality," 390; and Brown, *The Challenge of Islam*, 113.

55 On him, see Madelung, "Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib," *Elr*, 12:26–8.

56 On him, see Levi Della Vida, "Salmān al-Fārisī or Salmān Pāk," *ET*², 12:701–2; Savant, *The New Muslims*, 61–89.

57 Newman, *The Formative Period*, 59.

58 Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya," 523 n. 2; Newman, *The Formative Period*, 85; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 260 n. 566 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 216 n. 566]; cf. Amir-Moezzi, "Islam in Iran vii. The concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism," *Elr*, 14:137.

59 Amir Arjomand, "Imam *Abconditus*," 11 n. 83.

60 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:45. On the significance of the term *waṣī* in Shī'ī sources, see E. Kohlberg, "Waṣī," *ET*², 11:161–2.

61 On al-'Ayyāshī, see Poonawala, "'Ayyāshī, Abu'l-Naḍr Moḥammad," *Elr*, 3:163–4; Fahimi Tabar (trans. Melvin-Koushki), "Al-'Ayyāshī," *EIO*, where his dates are given as 260–329/874–941, making him contemporaneous with the period of the Lesser Occultation; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 56–8; Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, 84–5; Hamza, Rizvi, with Mayer (eds.), *An Anthology*, 26–7; Aḥmadīnizhād-Balkhī, "'Ayyāshī Samarqandī."

62 As noted by Hamza, Rizvi, with Mayer (eds.), *An Anthology*, 27, his comments on later verses are found in subsequent Shī'ī exegetical works.

is in a hadith ascribed to Imam ‘Alī about the Quranic figure Dhū l-Qarnayn. After recounting that Dhū l-Qarnayn concealed himself from his people before returning to them, ‘Alī declares, “and in your midst is one like him” (*wa-fikum mithluhu*).⁶³ The phrase may have been understood as a proleptic reference to the *ghayba* since Imāmī/Twelver sources consider the concealment of Dhū l-Qarnayn a prophetic precedent for the *ghayba* of the Qā’im.⁶⁴ It is more likely to have been understood as a reference to ‘Alī himself, as later Shī’ī (both Imāmī/Twelver and Ismā’īlī) texts identify Dhū l-Qarnayn as a typological prefiguration of ‘Alī.⁶⁵

The only other reference in al-‘Ayyāshī’s *tafsīr* is a long hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir which identifies “the distressed one” of Quran 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 toward the region of Dhū Ṭuwā,⁶⁶ al-Bāqir said, “The master of this *amr* will hide in one of these gorges. Two nights before he appears, the *mawlā*⁶⁷ who is at his disposal 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, ‘Identify ten of your leaders and the best among you.’ They will do so. 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/zuhūr*?]”⁶⁸

63 Al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*, 2:339. Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:41, recorded this report in his *tafsīr* as well and added the words *ya’nī nafsahu* (meaning himself, i.e., ‘Alī) after *wa-fikum mithluhu*. Cf. hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 13:300 (no. 19).

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

65 See, for example, Strothmann (ed.), *Arba’at kutub Ismā’īlīyya*, 138; al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, 257, 268; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 26:6; al-Ḥusaynī, *Manāqib-i Murtaḍā*, 136, 153; al-Ḥā’irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 1:39.

66 Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu’jam al-buldān*, 4:45, describes Dhū Ṭuwā as a place near Mecca. Shī’ī sources identify it as a mountain near Mecca that serves at times as the residence of the Hidden Imam. See Muḥsin Mu’īnī, “Dhī Ṭuwā,” *DMT*, 8:73–4; Arastu (trans.), *al-Nudbah*, 93 (n. 136). *Ṭuwā* is an enigmatic term mentioned twice in the Quran (Quran 20:12, 79:16) as the name of a sacred valley where Moses encountered God. See Rubin, “Moses and the Holy Valley Ṭuwan.” Brinner, “Ṭuwā,” *EQ*, 5:395–6, 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.”

67 On the term *mawlā*, see chapter 2.

68 Al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*, 2:56. Also cited in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:341 (no. 91);

This hadith is also likely of Wāqifi origin. In a report that resembles the text of this hadith, a believer meets the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāzīm, and one of his servants (*khādim*), and is told they have settled in Dhū Ṭuwā.⁶⁹ The reference to gorges (*shu'āb*) is likely meant to recall the story of Muḥammad concealing himself in the ravine of Shi'b Abi Ṭālib outside Mecca. In Shī'i sources, this account and the report of the time when the Prophet and Abū Bakr hid in a cave on the journey to Yathrib, are adduced as evidence that Muḥammad himself was forced into two periods of *ghayba* out of fear for his life.⁷⁰

These few references notwithstanding, the fact that the above commentaries are almost silent about the *ghayba* is peculiar, in particular in the case of al-Qummī, who was one of al-Kulaynī's teachers⁷¹ and whose name is found in the chains of transmission (*isnād*, pl. *asānīd*) of no fewer than one-third of the hadiths al-Kulaynī transmits in *al-Kāfi*, including most of the reports concerning the Qā'im and his *ghayba*.⁷² Three explanations can be offered for this relative silence: (1) the genre of *tafsīr* was not deemed appropriate for transmitting hadiths about the Qā'im, and, instead, such hadiths were collected and recorded in treatises and works on the *ghayba* that have not survived but which are referred to in biographical and bibliographical works produced in the next century;⁷³ (2) some of the hadiths about the *ghayba* of the Qā'im did not exist or were not known to the above-mentioned Quran commentators, suggesting that they were discovered or written later; or (3) it was not considered necessary to elaborate on the doctrine of the *ghayba*, since the proto-Twelve Shī'a shared the same messianic beliefs in the Qā'im as other contemporary

al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān fi tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 2:686 (no. 4273). A similar hadith with a different chain of transmission is cited in al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 187 (no. 30).

69 Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, 338–340 (no. 296).

70 See al-Ṣādūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 92; al-Murtaḍā, *Mas'ala wajīza*, 11 [translated in Sachedina, "A Treatise on the Occultation," 121]; al-Murtaḍā [al-Shaykh al-Mufīd], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 58; al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-shāfi*, 4:215–6; al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī, *al-Maslak fi uṣūl al-dīn*, 282; Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya," 529; Kohlberg, "Taqīyya in Shī'i Theology and Religion," 349. For the story of the Prophet hiding in Shi'b Abi Ṭālib, see al-Majlisī, *Ḥayāt al-qulūb*, 3:795. Cf. statement attributed to al-Ṣādūq in the *Kitāb al-Haft wa-l-aẓilla*, composed between the second/eighth and fifth/eleventh centuries and transmitted by Nuṣayrī Shī'a, which confirms his father's words that the master of the *amr* will conceal himself in a gorge (*fi ba'd ash'ābikum*) situated beyond the mountain of Qāf that encompasses the earth, al-Ju'fi (attrib.), *Kitāb al-Haft*, 173. On *Kitāb al-Haft wa-l-aẓilla*, see Asatryan, "Shiite Underground Literature Between Iraq and Syria."

71 Amir-Moezzi, "Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī," *ET*³ (online).

72 Ibrāhīmzādīh, "Thiqat al-Islām Kulaynī," 18.

73 A similar explanation has been advanced by Newman, *The Formative Period*, 84–5, for why *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* does not address the *ghayba* of the Imam.

Shī'ī groups, such as the followers of Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ (d. after 286/899),⁷⁴ who began his messianic and apocalyptic activities around the all-important year of 260/874.⁷⁵

2.1 *Al-Baṭā'inī and the Wāqifiyya*

Since all of the hadiths concerning the *ghayba* that I discuss in the remaining sections of this chapter and the next are likely of Wāqifi origin or explicitly transmitted on the authority of known Wāqifis, a brief overview of this sect is in order. Wāqifiyya is a designation originally used in biographical and here-siographical works for various groups of followers of the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799).⁷⁶ Al-Kāẓim lived in Medina all of his life, with two exceptions: (1) He was briefly arrested by the Abbasid caliph Muḥammad b. Maṣṣūr al-Mahdī (r. 158–169/775–785) 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 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, he immediately released al-Kāẓim, who subsequently returned to Medina. (2) He was arrested again on the order of the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–190/786–809) 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 183/799.⁷⁷ The Wāqifis (lit., “those who stop or put an end to” [the imamate with al-Kāẓim]) were those among al-Kāẓim's followers who denied that al-Kāẓim had died, claiming instead that he escaped from prison in Baghdad, went into hiding, and would reappear as the Qā'im. Al-Kāẓim's absence from his followers in prison and his alleged concealment gave rise, for the first time, to the idea of there being two periods of *ghayba* for the Qā'im.⁷⁸

74 On him, see Madelung, “Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ b. al-Ash'ath,” *EI*², 3:123–4; Madelung, “Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ.”

75 On the Qarmaṭiyya, see Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 147–67; Daftary, *Ismaili History and Intellectual Traditions*. On responses by Twelver scholars to the Qarmaṭiyya and Fatimid branches of the Ismā'īliyya, see chapter 3.

76 The best scholarly treatments of the Wāqifiyya are Buyukkara, “The Imami Shī'ī” and Buyukkara, “The Schism.” See also Halm, *Die Shia*, 37–9; Halm, “al-Wāqifa or al-Wāqifiyya,” *EI*²; Watt, “Sidelights on Early Imāmite Doctrine,” 295–6; Momen, *An Introduction to Shī'ī Islam*, 45, 56–7; Hussain, *The Occultation*, 39. For a traditional Imāmī/Twelver Shī'ī perspective on the sect, see al-'Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḍiyā' al-'ālamīn*, 2:335–7.

77 See Madelung, “Mūsā al-Kāẓim,” *EI*², 7:645.

78 Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya,” 532. Cf. Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis,” 494; Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism,” 263; and Amir-Moezzi, “Islam in Iran vii,” *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 Wāqefis of the seventh Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓem.” At least some Wāqifis claimed that al-Kāẓim had in fact died (though was not killed) but was then resurrected from the dead and entered into a second *ghayba*. See al-Nawbakhtī, *Kitāb Firaq*

The key figure in this movement was Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭā’īnī (d. ca. 201–2/816–8), a Kufan *mawlā* of the Anṣār who transmitted hadith from al-Ṣādiq and al-Kāẓim.⁷⁹ During al-Kāẓim’s time in Baghdad, al-Baṭā’īnī served as his agent (*wakīl*). After the death of al-Kāẓim, al-Baṭā’īnī was denounced by al-Kāẓim’s son ‘Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818), the eighth Imam of Twelver/Imāmī Shī‘ī Islam,⁸⁰ for serving as one of the principal leaders of the Wāqifiyya.⁸¹ Modarressi observes that al-Baṭā’īnī was reportedly the first to claim that al-Kāẓim had not died—and could not die—because he was the promised Qā’im. Al-Baṭā’īnī thus openly opposed al-Riḍā’s claim to the succession of the imamate. According to later sources, as the financial agent of al-Kāẓim, he and another agent of the Imam in Kufa had a large sum of money (30,000 *dīnārs* according to a report mentioned by Ibn Bābūya⁸²) in their possession when al-Kāẓim died. Rather than hand over these funds to al-Riḍā, these two agents kept the money⁸³ and maintained that al-Kāẓim had in fact not died but was simply in hiding. The fact that al-Kāẓim’s body was hung over a bridge in Baghdad by the Abbasid caliph for public display⁸⁴ did not prevent Wāqifis from refusing to deliver the *khums* tax to al-Riḍā.

al-Shī‘a, 68: “Some of them denied that he was killed. They said that he has died, that God lifted him up to Himself (cf. Quran 4:158), and would send him back when he rises (from the dead).”

79 Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 183–7 (no. 32), states that al-Baṭā’īnī was “reportedly the first to suggest that Mūsā al-Kāẓim did not die and to oppose ‘Alī al-Riḍā’s claim to the succession.” See also al-Sayyārī, *Revelation and Falsification*, 79 n. 58; al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 249–50; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 161–2 (no. 418); al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār ma’rifat al-rijāl*, 2:705, 706, 742, where al-Baṭā’īnī is denounced as “a doubt-filled liar”; al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl*, 181, 362–3, regards him as “extremely weak” (*da’if jiddan*) [on *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl*, see Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī*, 68]; Buyukkara, “The Schism,” 86–7; Halm, “Das ‘Buch der Schatten’ [I],” 27; al-Khū‘ī, *Mu’jam rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 12:234–51 (no. 7846). Al-Baṭā’īnī’s son, Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭā’īnī, was a Kufan *mawlā* of the Anṣār, a Wāqifi, and the author of the lost works *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, *Kitāb al-Qā’im*, and *Kitāb al-Fitan/al-malāḥim*, presumably written in defense of the Wāqifi belief in the *ghayba* of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and used by later scholars like al-Nu‘mānī. See al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār ma’rifat al-rijāl*, 2:827, who denounces al-Baṭā’īnī’s son as “an accused falsifier” (*kadhḥāb mal’ūn*), among other things; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 250–4 (no. 81); Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 45 n. 152, 87 n. 184.

80 On ‘Alī al-Riḍā, see Bayhom-Daou, “‘Alī al-Riḍā,” *EI*³ (online).

81 By contrast, those who acknowledged with certainty that al-Kāẓim had died are referred to as Qaṭ’iyya (those who “affirmed confidently” (*qaṭa’ū ‘alā*) the physical death of al-Kāẓim) in the Shī‘ī heresiographical works of al-Nawbakhtī and al-Ash‘arī al-Qummi.

82 Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*¹, 75 (no. 66).

83 Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 184; Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 62; Sachedina, “The Significance of Kashshī’s *Rijāl*,” 203–4; Kohlberg, “Mūsā al-Kāẓim,” *EI*², 7:647–8.

84 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 23. See also Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis,” 511 n. 24.

According to a report, after the passing of al-Kāẓim, one of his followers, Abū Jarīr al-Qummī,⁸⁵ appeared before al-Riḍā and asked whether he was the new Imam or whether his father was still alive as alleged by many of his close disciples (that is, the Wāqifis).⁸⁶ Al-Riḍā affirmed that al-Kāẓim had indeed died. Al-Qummī then stated that some of the Shī‘a were claiming that al-Kāẓim would manifest the prophetic precedent (*sunna*) of four prophets, alluding to a hadith attributed to al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq in various forms that states, in part, like Joseph, the Qā‘im will be concealed. Al-Riḍā again responded:

“I swear by God, beside whom there is no other God, that (al-Kāẓim) perished (*halaka*)!”

Al-Qummī then asked, “Did he perish in the sense that he is now hiding or did he perish in the sense that he is dead? (*halāka ghaybatin aw halāka mawtin*).”

Al-Riḍā answered, “He perished in the sense of having died.”

Al-Qummī then asked, “Are you practicing *taqīyya* with me?”⁸⁷

Al-Riḍā answered, “Good God! [That is not the case!]”

Al-Qummī said, “Did he appoint you as the executor of his will?”

Al-Riḍā said, “Yes.”

Al-Qummī said, “Did he appoint anyone else along with you [as executor of his will] (*fa-ashraka ma‘ak fihā*)?”

Al-Riḍā answered, “No.”

Al-Qummī said, “Are any of your brothers an Imam over you [that is, do any of your brothers have a greater right than you to be an Imam]?”

Al-Riḍā said, “No.”

Al-Qummī finally asked, “Then, are you the Imam?”

Al-Riḍā said, “Yes!”⁸⁸

As pointed out by Madelung, “Many, perhaps the majority, of the Kufan Imāmī transmitters in the third/ninth century belonged to this sect [i.e., the Wāqīfiyya].”⁸⁹ Later *rijāl* works identify al-Baṭā‘inī and several other hadith trans-

85 On him, see al-Sayyārī, *Revelation and Falsification*, 74 n. 47.

86 On Abū Jarīr al-Qummī, see al-Sayyārī, *Revelation and Falsification*, 74 n. 47.

87 By *taqīyya* here is meant the cautionary protection of a secret.

88 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:380, no. 1. In a different hadith, al-Riḍā exclaims, “Gracious God! The Messenger of God died, but Mūsā [al-Kāẓim] cannot die? I swear by God, Mūsā passed away (*maḍā*) just as the Messenger of God passed away.” Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:380 (no. 2). A similar hadith, mentioned by al-Kashshī, is quoted in Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 88–9 n. 191.

89 Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, 80.

mitters as Wāqifīs in a clear attempt to discredit them as untrustworthy transmitters of hadith. However, as I show, this did not prevent authors of the *ghayba* works from using hadiths transmitted on their authority about the Qā'im and his *ghayba*. I will return to the Wāqifiyya in the pages to come.

3 The Hadith Compilation of al-Kulaynī

Having considered the works produced prior to al-Kulaynī, I now turn to the oldest extant work that includes accounts of those who saw and recognized the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation, namely, al-Kulaynī's (d. 328–9/940–1)⁹⁰ hadith compendium, *al-Kāfi*, widely recognized as the most important Imāmī Shī'ī work that has survived from the period of the Lesser Occultation.⁹¹ Al-Kulaynī was as outspoken as his predecessors were quiet on the issue of the Imam's *ghayba*.⁹² Of the thirty-one hadiths al-Kulaynī recorded in the chapter on the *ghayba* in his *Uṣūl al-kāfi*, only three state that the Qā'im will have two distinct occultations. Throughout his work, al-Kulaynī mentions the names of several individuals who served as the Imam's deputies and agents (*wukalā'*) in different regions, from Yemen to Nishābūr. The agents collected the *khums* and *zakāt* taxes from believers and carried messages to and from the Imam.⁹³ In a chapter entitled “the names of those who saw (the twelfth

90 On al-Kulaynī and his *al-Kāfi*, see Kohlberg, “Kolayni,” *EIr* (online), Madelung, “al-Kulaynī (or al-Kulīnī),” *EIr*², 5:362–363; Muḥammadzādīh and Ṭāvūsī-Masrūr, “Kulaynī,” *DMT*, 14: 166–9; Kazemi-Moussavi, “Hadith ii. In Shī'ism,” *EIr*, 11:447–9; Ahmad, “Twelver Shī'ī *hadīth*,” 134–5; Newman, *The Formative Period*, passim; Akhtar, *Early Shī'ite Imāmīyyah Thinkers*, 1–37; Amir-Moezzi and Ansari, “Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī,” 191–247; Arastu, “Preface,” xi–xliii.

91 Amir Arjomand, “The Consolation of Theology,” 551. Al-Kāshānī, *al-Wāfi*, 1:5, for example, praised *al-Kāfi* as “the most trustworthy and most complete” of the four main Shī'ī hadith collections.

92 One of al-Kulaynī's main sources for hadiths about the Qā'im was a collection titled *Akhbār al-qā'im* passed down to him by his uncle.

93 See Newman, *The Formative Period*, 151. At that 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 ṣāhib al-amr wa-sa'alahu mas'āl fi abwāb al-shar'a*). Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 354–5 (no. 949). Here al-Najāshī is referring to Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Ja'far al-Ḥimyarī, known as Abū Ja'far al-Qummī (fl. late third/ninth to early fourth/tenth century). A book entitled *Kitāb al-Ghayba* is attributed to al-Ḥimyarī's father, known as “Shaykh of the Qummīs,” but it has not survived. See Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 216 (no. 566); Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis,” 503.

Imam),”⁹⁴ al-Kulaynī transmits fifteen separate reports (all but one from a single transmitter) of believers who saw the Imam as an infant in Samarra 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 Hidden Imam as a boy during the lifetime of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, or so-and-so reported that he saw the Hidden Imam 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 contains a clear narrative structure, and (2) the *isnād* reverts to an anonymous source, namely, “one of the residents of al-Madā’in.”⁹⁵ Similar accounts appear and multiply in later works.⁹⁶ Since this account is representative of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam from the Lesser Occultation, it is useful to recount its details.

The narrator states that he traveled to Mecca to perform the hajj with one of his companions. They arrive at the halting station (*al-mawqif*) in the plain of Arafat.⁹⁷ Suddenly, they see a youth (*shābb*) seated on the ground, wearing a cloth around his waist and yellow sandals on his feet. They are struck by the fact that this youth does not show any of the strains of travel. A mendicant approaches them, but they quickly wave him away. He moves on to the youth and begs him for money. The youth picks up something from the ground and hands it to him. The beggar prays for the youth fervently and for a long time. The youth then disappears from their sight (*ghāba*). Intrigued, the narrator and his companion approach the mendicant and ask to see what the youth gave him. The beggar takes out a small piece of gold which they estimate to be twenty *mithqāls*.⁹⁸ The two immediately realize that the youth was their “master” (*mawlā*), by whom the author means the Hidden Imam. They search for him frantically but are unable to find him. They then ask their fellow pilgrims to Mecca and Medina whether they knew anything about this young man. They

94 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:329–32.

95 [= *ba‘d ahl al-madā’in*] Al-Madā’in (previously Ctesiphon) was a metropolis on the Tigris River that declined in importance after the founding of Baghdad. See Streck and Morony, “al-Madā’in,” *EI*², and Morony, “Madā’en,” *EI* (online). According to Muḥarramī, *Tārīkh-i tashayyū‘*, 181, most of the residents were Shī‘ī or pro-‘Alids during the first/seventh to third/ninth centuries.

96 See al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 399–435 (chapter 44: “mention of those who saw him [the Hidden Imam] and spoke with him”); al-Mufīd, *al-‘Irshād fī ma‘rifat ḥujaj Allāh ‘alā l-‘ibād*, 2:351–4 (“mention of those who saw the twelfth Imam, and some of his proofs and evidences”); al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 253–80; al-Qazwīnī, *al-Imām al-Mahdī*, 187–93; al-Ṣadr, *Tārīkh al-ghayba al-ṣughrā*, 566–90; al-Amīn, *A‘yān al-Shī‘a*, 2:70–1; Ghaemmaghami, “Numinous Vision,” 51–76.

97 On the significance of the halting station (*al-mawqif*), see Wensinck, “Mawqif,” *EI*², 6:874.

98 One *mithqāl* is equivalent to 3.4 ounces, or 4.8 grams.

learn that he is “a youth and a descendant of ‘Alī (*shābb ‘alawī*) who performs the hajj on foot each year.”⁹⁹

Amir-Moezzi argues that such reports of sightings of and encounters with the Hidden Imam found in *al-Kāfi* were aimed, principally, at proving that the eleventh Imam had a surviving son who was the expected Qā'im.¹⁰⁰ These reports, however, were atypical. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Bābūya (d. 329/940–1; the father of al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq), who died near the end of the Lesser Occultation, for instance, did not cite a single account of a sighting of the Hidden Imam in his *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira 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 twelfth Imam.¹⁰¹ There are also no accounts, or any mention of the Hidden Imam, in one of the few works to have survived from the period of the Lesser Occultation, namely, al-Ṭabarī al-Imāmī's (fl. early fourth/tenth century) *al-Mustarshad fī l-imāma*.¹⁰² Some three decades after

99 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:332 (no. 15). Also referred to in al-Kāshānī, *al-Wāfi*, 2:401 (no. 899); al-Bāḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 64 (no. 33), 276 (114); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:59–60 (no. 43) [= al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd* (trans. Davānī), 799]; al-Majlisī, *Haqq al-yaqīn*, 317; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 281; Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 114. A similar account is summarized in Sell, *Ithna ‘Ashariyya*, 55–6. For a comparison of this and similar stories with a widely known version of a hadith describing the Prophet's encounter with God in the form of a handsome youth (*shābb*) wearing yellow sandals, see Ghaem-maghani, “Numinous Vision,” 51–76.

100 Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 110, 121.

101 Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 114. On Ibn Bābūya and *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*, see Ansari, *L'imamat*, 18–27. Ibn Bābūya is said to have been in contact with the third and fourth emissaries of the Hidden Imam. See Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*², 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. This type of story was meant to affirm the intercessory power of the Hidden Imam (and by extension, all members of the *ahl al-bayt* at whose shrines believers recite prayers for intercession). Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*², 22 (from the editor's introduction); al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 321 (no. 267); Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 201 n. 98; Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 18. Amir-Moezzi adds that Ibn Bābūya (the father) cited messages in his *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra* that were transmitted by the Hidden Imam through his emissaries and representatives. The chapter in which these messages appear (called *bāb imāmat al-Qā'im*) is in fact part of an addendum (*mustadrak*) to the manuscript of *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira 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, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*¹]. It does not appear in the earliest manuscript or in the later Beirut edition of the text [Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*²].

102 Al-Ṭabarī al-Imāmī, a contemporary of Al-Kulaynī, wrote *al-Mustarshad* to prove the ima-

the start of the Greater Occultation, matters appear to have changed rather quickly; at the time, a report cited by al-Ṣadūq mentions the names of sixty-eight individuals who saw the Hidden Imam or witnessed his miracles during the Lesser Occultation.¹⁰³

The authors of numerous Shī'ī hagiographies put forward the claim that not only was al-Kulaynī in contact with the Hidden Imam, but that his *al-Kāfi* was sanctioned by the Imam or one of his emissaries, attributing an oft-cited saying to the Imam: "*Al-Kāfi* suffices our followers" (*al-kāfi kāfin li-sh'ātinā*).¹⁰⁴ However, there is no historical evidence to support these apocryphal claims. This saying, attributed to the Hidden Imam, is not mentioned in any early work

mate of 'Alī. The scholar should not be confused with al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr (on whom, see chapter 4). Several other works where one might expect to find accounts of Lesser Occultation encounters do not contain any such reports, e.g., al-Rāzī's (fl. fourth/tenth century) *Kifāyat al-athar fi al-naṣṣ 'alā al-a'imma al-ithnā 'ashar*, written to prove the investiture of the twelve Imams. The only hadith in this work that speaks of someone seeing the Hidden Imam is the following, attributed to al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī: "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 (*khalqan wa-khulqan*). May God protect him during his *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-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, 291. On this work and its author, who is frequently referred to as al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, see *ibid.*, 6–11; Ansari, *L'imamat*, 98–105; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 56 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 22]. Al-Rāzī does transmit a number of apocalyptic hadiths about the Mahdī, perhaps none more important than a hadith ascribed to the Prophet identifying where the Imam will appear. This hadith stipulates that when the world is filled with confusion and chaos (*harjan marjan*), God will grant the Qā'im permission to manifest himself from a village in Yemen called Kar'a. The Qā'im will then emerge wearing a turban, entrusted with the sword of Prophet Muḥammad, and preceded by a caller (cf. Quran 50:41) who will proclaim to the world: "This is the Mahdī, the caliph of God! Follow him!" See al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, 150–1. Other manuscripts of this work have Akra'a, Karīma, and Karīmah instead of Kar'a. Al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, 150 n. 7. This hadith is widely cited in Sunnī sources in various forms, e.g., al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 4:452. See also Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, 179. An account of an encounter with an old man who is identified as the Mahdī identifies his location as Kar'a. Al-Bayāḍī (d. 877/1472–3), *al-Ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*, 2:261. Cf. al-'Āmilī al-Iṣfāhānī, *Ḍiyā' al-'ālamīn*, 2:243, where the old man is identified as a youth (*shābb*).

103 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 406–7 (no. 16); al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 52:30–31 (no. 26). Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī adds to this list some 240 other individuals who are said to have seen the Imam during the Lesser Occultation. Al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:446–52. Also referenced by 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-Najafī, *Aqā'id al-imāmiyya*, 1: 248; Ṭayyib, *Kalīm al-ṭayyib*, 537.

104 See Ibrāhīmzādīh, "Thiqat al-Islām Kulaynī," 21.

or collection of the Imam's *tawqī'āt*. Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659–60) cites a passage that resembles it, “*Al-Kāfī* is sufficient for knowing the Imams” (*al-kāfī kāfin fī ma'rifat al-a'imma*),¹⁰⁵ though al-Majlisī does not attribute these words to the Hidden Imam. More importantly, al-Kulaynī and his students do not allude to his having encountered the Hidden Imam. Al-Kulaynī's decision to spend twenty years of his life producing a voluminous compilation of some 16,000 Shī'ī hadiths meant to serve as an authoritative guide on theology and *fiqh* was itself inspired by the belief that the Imam was no longer accessible to the majority of his followers.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, al-Kulaynī himself, in the introduction to *al-Kāfī*, bemoans the fact that “knowledge in its entirety has nearly dried up and been cut off from its source, for people are content to rely on ignorance and to let knowledge and scholars waste away.”¹⁰⁷

4 The Hidden Imam: Unseen and Unrecognized

The overwhelming majority of hadiths and reports found in al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī* and the earliest surviving *ghayba* apologetics maintain that the Qā'im cannot be seen or recognized during his *ghayba* in general and in the second or longer *ghayba* in particular. At the outset, it must be said that there are clear contradictions in these sources. These inconsistencies reflect the *ḥayra* (the crisis of mass confusion, uncertainty, helplessness, loss and perplexity) that reigned after the sudden and unexpected death of the young eleventh Imam.¹⁰⁸ The chapter on the *ghayba* in al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*, for example, cites conflicting hadiths, at times from the same people, about the year of the birth of the twelfth Imam¹⁰⁹ and the number of *ghaybas* (one or two) he would experience.¹¹⁰

One of the most glaring discrepancies concerns the length of his absence. 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*)

105 Al-Majlisī, *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*, 13:262.

106 Arastu, “Preface,” xxiv–xxviii, provides several responses to the claim that *al-Kāfī* was approved by Hidden Imam or his representatives.

107 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:5. Translation cited from al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī: The Earliest and Most Important Compilation of Traditions from Prophet Muhammad and His Successors* (trans. Islamic Texts Institute), 1:xlviii.

108 Al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, 193.

109 See Newman, *The Formative Period*, 150.

110 See Newman, *The Formative Period*, 120, 139 (nn. 17–8); Newman, “Between Qumm and the West,” 95.

will last forty days while the other (*ghayba*) will last six months or something close to that.”¹¹¹ By contrast, a hadith ascribed to ‘Alī stipulates that there will be one *ghayba* that will last “six days, six months, or six years.”¹¹²

The hadiths likewise present a conflicting picture about the nature of the *ghayba*. On the one hand, there are hadiths that explicitly state that the Imam cannot be seen. This of course is the meaning of *ghayba*, a verbal-noun that denotes “to vanish; to be or become absent, hidden, or concealed from sight.” According to a hadith ascribed to al-Riḍā, after he enters into *ghayba*, in order to seek refuge and be protected from his enemies, the Qā’im’s “body will not be seen and he will not called by his name until all of creation sees him, his name is announced, and [everyone] hears it.”¹¹³

When Muḥammad b. Ziyād al-Azdī¹¹⁴ asked al-Kāẓim about the passage “and He has lavished upon you His blessings, both outwardly and inwardly?” (Quran 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.”¹¹⁵ A well-known hadith ascribed to the Prophet states that the Imam “will be concealed from his Shī‘a and his closest friends/initiates.”¹¹⁶ The Prophet goes on to say that during the *ghayba*, the Imam’s partisans will be illuminated by his light and

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

112 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:338 (no. 7). Later scholars, obviously concerned 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 n. 259. To the sources mentioned by Modarressi in this note can be added al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Ikhtisās*, 209.

113 [= *lā yurā jismuhu wa-lā yusammā bismihi aḥad ba’da ghaybatihī ḥattā yarāhu wa-yu’alan bismihi wa-yasma’ahu kull al-khalq*] Al-Khaṣībī, *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, 364. Other forms of this hadith occur in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:333 (no. 3); Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-taḥṣira min al-ḥayra*¹, 117; al-Mas’ūdī (attrib.), *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, 266; al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 587 (no. 2); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:33 (no. 12); al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:93 (no. 179), 5:107 (no. 226), 5:208 (no. 754).

114 Muḥammad b. Abī ‘Umayr Ziyād b. ‘Īsā Abū Aḥmad al-Azdī. On him, see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 326–7 (no. 887); Ibn Dāwūd, *Rijāl Ibn Dāwūd*, 159–60 (no. 1272); al-Khū‘ī, *Muḥjam rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 15:291–306 (no. 10043); Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, index, s.v. “Ibn Abī ‘Umayr.”

115 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 344 (no. 6). Also cited in al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, 270; al-Kāshānī, *Navādir al-akhbār*, 225; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:150 (no. 2). Cf. al-Nīlī, *Muntakhab al-anwār al-mudū‘a*, 39–40; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* 51:64; al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:195 (no. 676), 5:210 (no. 762).

116 [= *yaghīb ‘an shī‘atihī wa-awliyā’ihī*]

benefit from his *walāya* in the same way that people draw benefit from the sun when it is hidden behind the clouds.¹¹⁷ This hadith was clearly meant to convey the idea that the benefits of the imamate continue even though he may be absent. Similarly, a long hadith ascribed to ‘Alī implies that the Hidden Imam is omnipresent but cannot be seen:

He moves 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. Quran 15:38, 38:81] [when] the promise [will be fulfilled] [cf. Quran 21:97] and the call of the one who calls from the sky [cf. Quran 50:41] [will be heard]. Truly, on that day, blissful joy [cf. Quran 76:11] will be the lot of the progeny of ‘Alī and his Shī‘a.¹¹⁸

Other hadiths recorded by al-Ṣadūq compare the Shī‘a to cattle searching for pasture yet unable to find it.¹¹⁹ Still other hadiths state that the Imam “will not appear to them [i.e., his followers], and they will not know his location.”¹²⁰ Similar hadiths that “none will see him” (*fa-lā yarāhu aḥad*) or “his body/per-

117 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 241 (no. 3); Subḥānī, *Manshūr-i ‘aqāyid-i imāmiyyih*, 177 [= Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi‘i Islam* (trans. Shah-Kazemi), 117]; al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī‘a*, 2:62; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 282 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 116]. A different hadith attributes the same words to al-Ṣadīq. See al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 199 (no. 22). Moreover, a similar expression is found in a *tawqīf* attributed to the Hidden Imam and produced by the second *safīr*, Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-‘Amrī (this may have been the last *tawqīf* that was transmitted by the second *safīr*, sometime around the year 281/895), recorded in al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 292, and translated in Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām*, 221: “As for the benefits that can accrue from me during my *ghayba*, they are like those of the sun when clouds hide it from the sight of men.” For other translations of this hadith, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 282 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 116]; Amir Arjomand, “Imam *Absconditus*,” 4; Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis,” 502–3. Cf. the well-known prophetic hadith transmitted in Sunnī hadith collections on the authority of Abū Hurayra (d. ca. 58/678), the famous companion of the Prophet Muḥammad: “The people said to the Messenger of God: ‘O Messenger of God! Will we see our Lord on the Day of Resurrection?’ He responded: ‘Do you have any trouble seeing the moon when it is full?’ (*hal tuḍārrūn fī ru’yat al-qamar laylat al-badr*) They said no. He asked them, ‘Do you have any trouble [seeing] the sun when it is not covered by clouds?’ (*hal tuḍārrūn fī l-shams laysa dūnahā saḥāb*) They said no. He said: ‘You will behold [God] in the same manner that you see the sun and the moon.’” Al-Nishābūrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:112; and cf. *ibid.*, 1:114–5; 8:216.

118 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 146.

119 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 286 (no. 12), 286–7 (no. 14).

120 Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*¹; al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 165 (no. 1); al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 457 (no. 468).

son/corporeal form will not be seen" (*lā yurā shakhṣuhu*) are found throughout the earliest sources on the *ghayba* of the Imam.¹²¹

Rather than expect to see the Imam, the Shī'a are exhorted to wait patiently for his appearance (*zuhūr*), inasmuch as his appearance will relieve them from sorrow. Yearning for the Imam's deliverance from trials and tribulations (*intizār al-faraj*) is "the best of acts" (*afḍal a'māl*) and the greatest mode of worshiping God.¹²² Indeed, one of the purposes of *intizār* (waiting expectantly for the appearance of the Imam) is to test (*tamhīṣ, imtiḥān*) the faith of the Shī'a.¹²³

4.1 *The Hidden Imam: Unseen and Unrecognized on Pilgrimage*

A number of hadiths state that the Imam attends the pilgrimage to Mecca each year, thereby suggesting that he lives among the people incognito. 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."¹²⁴ This hadith is likely meant to emphasize that the Imam, whether physically or spiritually, does in fact attend the pilgrimage each year.

A set of four hadiths likewise attributed to al-Ṣādiq and transmitted on the authority of Zurāra b. A'yān (d. 148–9/765–7)¹²⁵ (or his son 'Ubayd¹²⁶) affirm

121 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 237; al-Ṣādūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 353 (no. 1). In a passage found in a well-known hadith transmitted on the authority of al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fī, al-Ṣādiq states that after the Imam enters into hiding, "no eye will see him until every person and every eye sees him" (*fa-lā tarāhu 'ayn ḥattā yarāhu kull aḥad wa-kull 'ayn*). Al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, 440; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* 53:6. See also al-Aḥsā'ī, *al-Arba'ūn ḥadīthan*, 267.

122 Al-Ṣādūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 584 (no. 3). See also the other hadiths in the same chapter, entitled *bāb mā ruwiya fi thawāb al-muntaẓir li-l-faraj* as well as the hadiths mentioned al-Kāshānī, *Nawādir al-akḥbār*, 249–51 (*bāb intizār al-faraj fi ghaybatihī*). On the Shī'ī conception of *intizār*, see Turner, *Islam without Allah?*, 194–215; Turner, "Still Waiting for the Imam?", 29–47.

123 See, e.g., al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 339–40 (nos. 286–8); al-Kāshānī, *Nawādir al-akḥbār*, 251–2 (*bāb al-tamhīṣ*).

124 [= *al-'ām alladhī lā yashhad ṣāhib ḥādthā l-amr al-mawṣim lā yuqbal min al-nās ḥajjuhum*] Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, 487 (no. 485); al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, 6:283 (no. 7); al-Baḥrānī adds that Zayn al-Dīn al-'Āmilī (known as al-Shahīd al-Thānī) (d. 965/1557–8 or 966/1558–9) has mentioned (a hadith?) in his *Manāsik* that states that when the master of the *amr* attends the pilgrimage, Iblis does not.

125 Abū l-Ḥasan Zurāra b. A'yan b. Sunsun, a Kufan who transmitted hadith from al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq, is numbered among the first Shī'ī *mutakallimūn* in heresiographical and bio-bibliographical sources. He is identified by Modarressi as "the most prominent Shī'ite scholar of his generation." Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 404–5. See also Sachedina, "The Significance of Kashshī's *Rijāl*," 198–202 (section titled "Zurārah ibn A'yān"); Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 35; Momen, *An Introduction to Shī'ī Islam*, 77.

126 'Ubayd b. Zurāra b. A'yan was a hadith transmitter from Kufa. On him, see Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 383–4.

that while the Imam, or more specifically the Qā'im, is present on pilgrimage and sees and recognizes the pilgrims, they are incapable of seeing him:

(١) يَفْقِدُ النَّاسُ إِمَامَهُمْ يَشْهَدُ الْمَوْسِمَ فَيَرَاهُمْ وَلَا يَرَوْنَهُ

(1) The people will miss their Imam. He will attend the hajj festival (*al-mawsim*) and see them, but they will not see him.¹²⁷

(٢) لِلْقَائِمِ غَيْبَتَانِ يَشْهَدُ فِي إِحْدَاهُمَا الْمَوْسِمَ يَرَى النَّاسَ وَلَا يَرَوْنَهُ

(2) The Qā'im will have two *ghaybas*. During one of them, he will attend the hajj festivals. He will see the people, but they will not see him.¹²⁸

(٣) يَفْتَقِدُ النَّاسُ إِمَامًا يَشْهَدُ الْمَوْسِمَ يَرَاهُمْ وَلَا يَرَوْنَهُ

(3) The people will miss an Imam. He will attend the hajj festivals. He will see [the people], but they will not see him.¹²⁹

127 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:337–8 (no. 6). Also cited in al-Ḥalabī, *Taqrīb al-ma'ārif*, 432; al-Kāshānī, *al-Wāfi*, 2:413 (no. 917); al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:55 (no. 19). The same *matn* with a slightly different *isnād* is cited by al-Ṣadūq in the chapter of his work on hadiths ascribed to al-Ṣādiq concerning the Qā'im and his *ghayba*, al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 330 (no. 49). For a slightly different version of the hadith with similar *isnād* recorded by al-Ṣadūq on the authority of his father, see al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn* 325 (no. 34), 404 (no. 7); also cited in al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, 6:281 (no. 2); Rayshahri, *The Scale of Wisdom*, 253. This hadith is also found in al-Ṣadūq's father's work, Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-taḥṣīr min al-ḥayra*¹, 126. The same hadith is also cited by al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 161 (no. 119), and al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, 482 (no. 477), 531 (no. 509). Al-Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-'uqūl*, 4:42, considered this hadith weak (*ḍa'īf*) but nonetheless mentions the various versions in his *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52, 151–2 (no. 2). For the Persian translation, see Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī, *Bayān al-furqān*, 899. The verb *yafqid* means “to lose” and “to miss” and is found in the Quranic story of Joseph (Q 12:71–2). Other hadiths use the same verb: a hadith ascribed to al-Kāẓim begins with “When the fifth descendant of the seventh goes missing (*fuqida*) ...”, al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 156 (no. 11); another hadith states “The master of this *amr* will be missed for a time ...” (*ṣāhib ḥādthā l-amr yufqad zamānan*), al-Nu'mānī, *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 (*uftuqida*), rather than die, the Imam travels to the island and waits there for the time of his return (see chapter 4).

128 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:339 (no. 12); al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, 6:281–2 (no. 3); Klemm, “Die vier *sufarā*,” 142; Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 84.

129 Al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 180 (no. 13); al-Aḥsā'ī, *al-Arba'ūn ḥadīthan*, 266–9. Hadiths 1 and 3

(٤) إِنَّ لِلْقَائِمِ غَيْبَتَيْنِ يَرْجِعُ فِي إِحْدَاهُمَا وَفِي الْأُخْرَى لَا يَدْرِي أَيْنَ هُوَ يَشْهَدُ الْمَوَاسِمَ يَرَى النَّاسَ وَلَا يَرَوْنَهُ

(4) The Qā'im 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 hajj festivals and see the people, but they will not see him.¹³⁰

5 The Hidden Imam: Seen but Not Recognized

Alongside the hadiths stating that the Imam cannot be seen are hadiths and reports that maintain that he *can* be seen without being recognized as the Imam. We cannot but notice the contrast between the four hadiths above, which explicitly state that the Imam cannot be seen during the pilgrimage, and the following report attributed to Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān al-'Amrī (d. ca. 305/917), later canonized as the second of the four official emissaries (*sufarā'*) of the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation:

speak generically about an Imam, but al-Kulaynī, al-Nu'mānī, and all of the scholars who followed them clearly believed that they applied to the Qā'im. The first three hadiths have the name of Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. Mālik b. 'Isā b. Sābūr al-Fazārī in the *isnād*, a Kufan *mawlā* of Asmā' b. Khārija b. Ḥisn al-Fazārī whom al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 122 (no. 313), calls a weak reporter of hadith: "Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn said that he used to grossly fabricate hadith (*yada' al-ḥadīth waḍ'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-madḥhab wa-l-riwāya*). According to Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 22, the term *fāsid al-madḥhab* sometimes designates those "who split from the community and established their own heretical sects on the basis of their interpretations." Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī (fl. mid. fifth century/eleventh century), *al-Rijāl li-Ibn al-Ghaḍā'irī*, 48 (no. 27), called him a liar (*kadhḥāb*) who held doctrines exaggerating the station of the Imams (*wa-fi madḥhabihi irtifā'*) and stated that he transmitted hadiths from weak and unknown narrators. On this basis, he ruled that all the hadiths he narrated should be rejected (*matrūk al-ḥadīth jumlatan*). (The expressions *ahl al-irtifā'* and *fī madḥhabihi irtifā'* were used in early Shī'ī *rijāl* works to describe the Mufawwiḍa. 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 (*thiqa wa-yuḍa' ifihu qawm*) and that he narrated many strange things about the birth of the Qā'im.

130 Al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 181 (no. 15); al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh al-a'imma wa-wafayātihim*, 265. For the Persian translation, see Dhākīrī, "Irtibāt bā imām-i zamān," 67; Amīnī, *Dādgustar-i jahān*, 204 [= Amīnī, *al-Imām al-Mahdī* (trans. Sachedina), 209]. On hadiths of the Imam attending the pilgrimage, see also al-Ṣaffār al-Najāfī, *Mawsū'at al-imām*, 6:446.

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ مَوْسَى بْنِ الْمُتَوَكِّلِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ جَعْفَرِ الْجَمْرِيِّ عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ عُمَانَ الْعَمَرِيِّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ سَمِعْتَهُ يَقُولُ وَاللَّهِ إِنَّ صَاحِبَ هَذَا الْأَمْرِ لِيَحْضُرُ الْمَوْسِمَ كُلَّ سَنَةٍ فَيَرَى النَّاسَ وَيَعْرِفُهُمْ وَيَرَوْنَهُ وَلَا يَعْرِفُونَهُ

I swear to God! The master of this *amr* attends the hajj festival every year. He sees the people and recognizes them, and they see him but do not recognize him.¹³¹

In reports and hadiths of this kind that affirm that the Hidden Imam can be seen but not recognized, the Qā'im is often compared to the Prophet Joseph. In fact, as we began to see earlier, no other prophet, with the possible exception of Muḥammad, is compared more often to the Qā'im than Joseph. The Qā'im "will have a *ghayba* like the *ghayba* of Joseph."¹³² A hadith of likely Wāqifi origin ascribed to al-Ṣādiq and transmitted by al-Baṭā'inī predicts that just as God

131 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 404 (no. 8); al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, 2:520; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 363–4 (with minor differences); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:352 (no. 4; from *Kamāl al-dīn*) [= al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:747–8]; al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, 6:282 (no. 4); Ṣamadī, "Barrasī-i mas'alih-yi," 196; Amir Arjomand, "Imam *Absconditus*," 2. According to two reports transmitted by the same narrator in al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn*, al-'Amrī saw the Hidden Imam in Mecca. In the first report, when asked if he saw master of the *amr*, al-'Amrī answered yes and added that the last pledge he made to him was at the Ka'ba. Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 404 (no. 9); al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, 6:282 (no. 5). In the second report, al-'Amrī says that he saw the Imam clinging to the curtains of the Ka'ba at the wall called al-Mustajār (tradition says that this was where 'Alī was born), and prayed, "O God! Take revenge on my enemies for my sake!" (*allāhumma intaqim lī min a'dā'ī*) Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 404 (no. 10); al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, 6:282 (no. 5). Cf. al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 252: "Take revenge on *your* enemies for my sake" (*intaqim lī min a'dā'ika*), and al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:351: "Take revenge on *your* enemies through me" (*intaqim bī min a'dā'ika*). Of course it is possible that the four hadiths introduced in the previous section could be reconciled with the above report, though I am only aware of one Shī'ī scholar who has attempted this reconciliation, namely al-Majlisī, who, in glossing one of the four previous hadiths, suggests that "perhaps the word 'seeing' [in these hadiths] means recognizing (*wa-la'alla al-murād... bi-l-ru'ya al-marifa*), in other words, none of the people will recognize him (*ay lā ya'rifuhu aḥad min al-nās*)." Al-Majlisī, *Mūrāt al-'uqūl*, 4:47.

132 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 Qā'im was to manifest, one might wonder why, but other Shī'ī hadiths indicate that the Qā'im will manifest many other attributes of Joseph, chief among them his beauty. Joseph serves as the embodiment and archetype of beauty, comeliness, modesty, and beneficence in Islamic literature. See al-Majlisī, *Ḥayāt al-qulūb*, 3:711, where Joseph is described as exceeding all others in beauty, as the full moon excels the star (*ziyādat-i ḥusn-i ū bar sāyir-i mardum mānand-i*

placed a figurative veil (*hijāb*) between Joseph and the people so that they saw him but could not recognize him (*yarawnahu wa-lā yaʿrifūnahu*), the master of the *amr* will likewise be veiled from the people.¹³³ According to al-Ṣādiq, the Qāʾim “knows the people, but they do not recognize him, just as Joseph knew the people, but they failed to recognize him,”¹³⁴ an allusion to Quran 12:58: “And the brethren of Joseph came, and entered unto him, and he knew them, but they knew him not.”¹³⁵ In this regard, al-Ṣādiq 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” (Quran 12:90). It is believed that when Joseph was in Egypt, he lived a distance of eighteen days travel from Jacob. God could have easily apprised Jacob about Joseph’s location but did not. Thus, al-Ṣādiq asks rhetorically, who is to say that God cannot conceal His Proof (that is, the Hidden Imam) in the same manner that He concealed Joseph from his family?¹³⁶ That is, like Joseph, the Qāʾim may be in close proximity to the believers during his *ghayba*, but they are unable to see him or know his location before his appearance (*ẓuhūr*) at the end of time.¹³⁷

ziyādatī-i mäh-i shab-i chahārdahum būd bar sitārigān); Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 64, 66. 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 (attrib.), *Ithbāt al-waṣṣiyya*, 267. According to a number of hadiths, the Qāʾim will appear wearing the shirt of Joseph. See, e.g., al-Ṣādūq, *Kamāl al-dīn* (1984 Qum edition), 1:143. A much rarer hadith adds that the believers throughout the world (lit., east and west) will smell his scent, for he will appear wearing the same shirt whose scent Jacob sensed when he declared, “I sense the scent of Joseph!” (Quran 92:12). The earliest and only work in which I have found this particular hadith is al-Bayāḍī (d. 877/1472–3), *al-Ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*, 2:253. Al-Bayāḍī does not provide a source, saying only that the hadith was narrated on the authority of al-Ṣādiq’s discipline, al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfi. On the symbolism of Joseph’s shirt and its scent, see Lawson, “Typological Figuration,” 231–9. On stories about Joseph in Shīʿī sources, see Arastu, *God’s Emissaries*, 253–99.

133 Al-Ṣādūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 329 (no. 46); al-Kāshānī, *al-Wāfi*, 2:424; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 51:223–4 (no. 10); al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:90 (no. 158); al-Shubbar, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 288; al-Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 301 (no. 5). For a Persian translation, see Ṣamadī, “Barrasī-i masʿalih-yi,” 195.

134 [= *yaʿrif al-nās wa-lā yaʿrifūnahu kamā kāna yūsuf yaʿrif al-nās wa-hum lahu munkirūn*] Al-Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba*, 144 (no. 2). Also cited in al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:144 (no. 462); al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 51:112–3 (no. 8); Dhākiri, “Irtibāt bā imām-i zamān,” 61.

135 [= *fa-ʿarafahum wa-lum lahu munkirūn*]

136 Al-Ṣādūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 320–1 (no. 21); al-Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba*, 167 (no. 4).

137 Cf. Kennedy’s insightful discussion of the literary energy of anagnorisis recognition and its entertainment and edification functions in classical Arabic literature in his *Recognition in the Arabic Narrative Tradition*. My thanks to Todd Lawson for this reference.

A similar hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq explicates the prophetic precedent (*sunna*) that the Qā'im will become manifest: "As for Joseph, his brothers spoke with him and paid homage to him but could not recognize him."¹³⁸ Another hadith comparing the Hidden Imam to previous prophets affirms 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 brothers despite the proximity between him and his family.¹³⁹ These hadiths reaffirm that like Joseph, the Hidden Imam is a normal human being who "walks in their markets" (*yasīr* [alt., *yamshī*] *fī aswāqihim*; cf. Quran 25:7, 25:20), lives among the people, and associates with them. The people see him but cannot recognize him.¹⁴⁰

Such hadiths appear to influence other hadiths, some found in later sources, indicating that when the Imam makes his appearance at the Ka'ba at the time of his *zuhūr*, he will appear as a young man wearing the mantle and sandals of the Prophet Muḥammad, but no one will recognize him.¹⁴¹

138 [= *wa-ammā sunnat Yūsuf fa-inna ikhwatahu kānū yubāyīʿūnahu wa-yukhātibūnahu walā yaʿrifūnahu*] Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 39. Cf. al-Karājī, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, 1:374, and al-Ḥalabī, *Taqrīb al-maʿārif*, 431, both of whom cite a similar hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir stating, in part, that the prophetic precedent of Joseph, which the Qā'im will manifest, is "ghayba from his family in such wise that he will not recognize them and they, in turn, will be unable to recognize him" (*fa-l-ghayba ʿan ahlihi bi-haythu lā yaʿrifuhum walā yaʿrifūnahu*). The wording here is peculiar, since, in the Quran, 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 as *fa-l-ghayba ʿan ahlihi bi-haythu yaʿrifuhum walā yaʿrifūnahu*.

139 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 306 (no. 7). Also cited in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:217–8 (no. 6); al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:83 (no. 131). Similar hadiths that compare Joseph and the Qā'im are summarized in al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-Shīʿa*, 2:59.

140 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:336–7 (no. 4); al-Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba*, 167; al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 145 (no. 11), 320–1 (no. 21). For the Persian translation of the version in al-Nuʿmānī, see Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī, *Bayān al-furqān*, 901. See also Amīnī, *Dādgustar-i jahān*, 205, 215 [= Amīnī, *al-Imām al-Mahdī* (trans. Sachedina), 210, 222]. Cf. Jarrar, "Al-Manṣūr bi-Llah's Controversy," 330. Other attempts have been made to explore the commonalities in the narratives of Joseph and the Hidden Imam. See, for example, al-Zaydī, *Asʿila muʿāṣira*, 385–93. Cf. hadiths cited in both Sunnī and Shīʿī works about al-Khiḍr and Ilyās (Elijah), who are said to be alive "walking on earth" (*bāqiyān yasīrān fī l-ard*). Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:98. On the manner in which early Shīʿī authors, such as al-Nuʿmānī and al-Ṣadūq, presented stories of various prophets who were at one time or another concealed to signify a prefiguration of the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam, see Warner, "Buddha or Yūdhāsaf?"

141 [= *laysa thamma aḥad yaʿrifuhu*] Al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 440; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 53:6–7.

Hidden from All, yet Seen by Some? The Special Case of Three Hadiths

The hadiths presented in the section entitled “The Hidden Imam: Unseen and Unrecognized” of the previous chapter suggest that no one can see the Imam. By contrast, those presented in the section entitled “The Hidden Imam: Seen But Not Recognized” affirm that it is possible to see the Imam though no one, not even his closest followers, is able to recognize him. On what basis, then, do later Shīī scholars who contend that it is possible to see *and* recognize the Hidden Imam base their claim? As might be expected, these scholars tend to emphasize the stories of sightings of and encounters with the Hidden Imam as the greatest proof that seeing and contacting him is possible during the Greater Occultation.

Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, who compiled two major collections of such stories in the late nineteenth century, for example, 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 muṭabarih*) or heard from trustworthy scholars and ulama. We left out a number of accounts that did not have a reliable chain of transmission.”¹ More recently, the publisher of a compilation of such stories writes, “Since there are so many widely attested reports (*al-akhbār al-kathīra wa-l-mutawātira*) from ulama and scholars (*al-fuḍalā*) [who said that they met the Hidden Imam], no one can deny or reject [this fact] and say it is impossible to see him during the occultation (*lā yumkin li-aḥādīn inkār wa-juhūd wa-istihālat mushāhadatihi fī zamān al-ghayba*).”²

Yet, in light of the final *tawqīr* of the Imam and the hadiths discussed in chapter 1, which explicitly deny that the Imam can be recognized during the *ghayba*, these scholars have sensed a need to support their position with traditional proofs. They have cited and glossed three hadiths—and only three—from the earliest sources and left open the possibility that a special cadre of believers can encounter (and recognize) the Imam during the Greater Occultation.³ In this chapter, I comment on these three hadiths, explore their *Sitz im Leben*, and examine how they have been understood and negotiated by traditional Shīī ulama and Western scholars and translators.

1 Al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqīb*, 2:846.

2 Al-Nīlī, *al-Sultān al-mufarrij*, dāl (from the publisher's introduction).

3 The three hadiths are isolated and commented on in Dhākīrī, “Irtibāṭ bā imām-i zamān.”

1 Hadith 1 (and Variants): “the 30 are never lonely”

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

A number of our masters⁴ < Aḥmad b. Muḥammad⁵ < al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Washshā⁶ < ‘Alī b. Abī Ḥamza [al-Baṭā’ini]⁷ < Abū Baṣīr⁸ < [Ja’far] al-Ṣādiq:

عَدَّةٌ مِنْ أَصْحَابِنَا عَنْ أَحْمَدَ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ عَنِ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ عَلِيٍّ الْوَشَّاءِ عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ أَبِي حَمْزَةَ عَنْ أَبِي بَصِيرٍ عَنِ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ قَالَ

The master of this *amr* will be forced into *ghayba* and he will certainly be isolated during his *ghayba*.⁹ Ṭayba is the best abode and the thirty are never lonely.¹⁰

لَا يَدُّ لِصَاحِبِ هَذَا الْأَمْرِ مِنْ غَيْبَةٍ وَلَا يَدُّ لَهُ فِي غَيْبَتِهِ مِنْ عَزْلَةٍ وَنِعَمَ الْمَنْزِلِ طَيِّبَةً وَمَا بِثَلَاثِينَ مِنْ وَحْشَةٍ

- 4 This formula is common in hadiths cited in *al-Kāfi* and suggests that al-Kulaynī considered the hadith as one attested to by multiple chains of transmission.
- 5 Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Ash‘arī (d. between 274/887 and 280/893), a companion of Imam al-Jawād and an associate of Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. See Newman, *The Formative Period*, 41–2, and index, s.v. “Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Īsā al-Ash‘arī.”
- 6 Al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Ziyād, known as Abū Muḥammad al-Washshā, was one of the companions of Imam al-Kāzīm and Imam al-Riḍā. He was a prominent believer (*min wujūh al-ṭā’ifa*). For a period of time, he was a Wāqifi but eventually became a believer in the eighth Imam. Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 39 (no. 80). See also al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 106 (no. 202); Ḥā’iri, “Ḥasan bin ‘Alī Vashshā,” *DMT*, 6:301.
- 7 On him, see chapter 1.
- 8 Abū Muḥammad Yaḥyā b. al-Qāsim al-Asadī (d. 149–50/767), known by his alternative *kunya* of Abū Baṣīr, was a Kufan *mawlā* and one of the most prolific transmitters of hadith from Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Imam Ja’far al-Ṣādiq. Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 441 (no. 1187); Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 395; Buyukkara, “The Schism,” 86–7. Newman, *The Formative Period*, 82, calls him “a Wāqifi companion of the fifth and sixth Imams,” but I have not seen any evidence in the Shī‘ī *rijāl* works to suggest that he held Wāqifi beliefs.
- 9 This sentence can be translated in a number of ways, e.g., “A *ghayba* is inevitable [or indispensable] for the master of this *amr*, and it is inevitable that he will be isolated during his *ghayba*.” Cf. a hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq: “The Qā’im must go into hiding” (*la budda li-l-qā’im min ghayba*). When pressed as to why this is the case, al-Ṣādiq responds, while pointing to his stomach to intimate that the Qā’im will be in danger of being stabbed, because “he fears for his life” (*yakhāf ‘alā nafsihi*). Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 437 (no. 7). For an alternative translation of this and a similar hadith, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 277 n. 612.
- 10 Lit., “and in thirty, there is no loneliness.” Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:340 (no. 16). Al-Nu‘mānī cites the same hadith on the authority of al-Kulaynī. Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 194 (no. 41) [= al-Nu‘mānī, *Ghaybat-i Nu‘mānī* (trans. Fahrī-Zanjāni), 220].

Following al-Kulaynī, two scholars presented this hadith in their works: (1) Al-Nu‘mānī (d. 345/956 or 360/971) (on whom see chapter 3), who transmitted numerous hadiths from his teacher al-Kulaynī and personally copied the latter’s *al-Kāfi*,¹¹ includes Hadith 1 verbatim in his *Kitāb al-Ghayba* (completed in Dhū l-Ḥijja 342/April–May 954),¹² (2) Abū l-Ṣalāḥ al-Ḥalabī (d. 447/1055) (on whom see chapter 3) cites Hadith 1 in his *Taqrīb al-ma‘ārif* without an *isnād*, though in his version the enigmatic phrase “and the thirty are never lonely” (discussed below) is absent.¹³

Moreover, al-Ṭūsī (d. 459 or 460/1066–7) (on whom, see chapter 3) recorded a similar hadith in his *Kitāb al-Ghayba* (completed in 447/1055–6) with a slightly different *isnād* ascribed to al-Bāqir (rather than al-Ṣādiq):

Aḥmad b. Idrīs¹⁴ < ‘Alī b. Muḥammad¹⁵ < al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīshābūrī¹⁶ < ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Najrān¹⁷ < ‘Alī b. Abī Ḥamza [al-Baṭā’inī]¹⁸ < Abū Baṣīr¹⁹ < al-Bāqir:

وَبِهَذَا الْإِسْنَادِ (أَبِي أَحْمَدُ بْنُ إِدْرِيسَ عَنْ عَلِيِّ
بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ) عَنِ الْفَضْلِ بْنِ شَاذَانَ النَّيْشَابُورِيِّ عَنِ
عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ أَبِي نَجْرَانَ عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ أَبِي حَمْرَةَ
عَنْ أَبِي بَصِيرٍ عَنْ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ قَالَ

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- 11 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 13; Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 102–3 n. 259.
- 12 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 194 (no. 31); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:157 (no. 20) [= al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw‘ūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:754; al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw‘ūd* (trans. Davānī), 932–3].
- 13 Al-Ḥalabī, *Taqrīb al-ma‘ārif*, 431.
- 14 On Aḥmad b. Idrīs b. Aḥmad Abū ‘Alī al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī, see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 92; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 71 (no. 81); Newman, *The Formative Period*, index, s.v. “Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Ash‘arī.”
- 15 This is likely ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abbān al-Rāzī al-Kulyanī, known as ‘Allān (or ‘Alān), the maternal uncle of Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, the author of a work that has not survived called *Kitāb akhbār al-Qā‘im*. Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 260–1 (no. 682). Al-Kulaynī transmits a number of hadiths from him in *al-Kāfi*.
- 16 Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīshābūrī (d. 260/873), a scholar and follower of the eleventh Imam. On him, see Kohlberg, “Faḍl b. Ṣādhān,” *Elr*, 9:463–464; Bayhom-Daou, “al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Naysābūrī,” *ET*³ (online); van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere*, 215–9. A book about the *ghayba* is attributed to him but has not survived. Klemm, “Die vier sufarâ,” 127; Hussain, *The Occultation*, 4. On this and other eschatological writings ascribed to him, see Ansari, *L’imamat*, 182–209.
- 17 ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Najrān al-Tamīmī, a Kufan *mawlā* who narrated hadiths from al-Riḍā. On him, see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 235–6 (no. 622); al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 177 (no. 475).
- 18 On him, see above.
- 19 On him, see above.

The master of this *amr* will be forced into isolation, but there is certainly power in his isolation. The thirty are never lonely and Ṭayba is the best abode.²⁰

لَا بَدَّ لِمَنْ يَصْحَابُ هَذَا الْأَمْرِ مِنْ عُرْلَةٍ وَلَا بَدَّ فِي
عُرْلَتِهِ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمَا يَثَلَاثِينَ مِنْ وَحْشَةٍ وَنَعَمَ
الْمَنْزِلُ طَيِّبَةٌ

1.1 *Hadīth 1: Commentary*

The most important name in the *isnād* of this hadith is ‘Alī b. Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭā’īnī, who, as mentioned in chapter 1, was one of the main leaders of the Wāqifiyya. Guided by the principles of *‘ilm al-dirāya* / *‘ilm dirāyat al-ḥadīth* (a field of study concerned with investigating, evaluating, and comprehending hadith), Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699–1700) classified this hadith as “weak or reliable/dependable” (*ḍa‘īf aw muwaththaq*), though he did not provide a reason.²¹ Other than al-Baṭā’īnī, the other individuals in the *isnād* are considered trustworthy (*thiqa*) in the various *rijāl* works.²² Thus, it would be safe to presume that al-Majlisī’s²³ rather uncertain classification was based on the presence in the *isnād* of the impugned Wāqifi al-Baṭā’īnī. Though al-Majlisī does not say so explicitly, he seems to imply that if al-Baṭā’īnī transmitted this hadith during the lifetime of al-Ṣādiq or al-Kāzīm (and thus, as a prophetic statement about the Hidden Imam), it could

20 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* 162 (no. 121). Also cited in al-Majlisī, *Mir’āt al-‘uqūl*, 4:51; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:153 (no. 6) [= al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw’ūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:748; al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw’ūd* (trans. Davānī), 930]. Cf. a hadith ascribed to Imam ‘Alī stating that when “a man from among my descendants appears at the end of time,” he will touch the head of his servants and God will grant each of them the strength of forty men. Al-Ṣādūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 592 (no. 17). Another hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir similarly states that each of the Imam’s men will have the strength of forty men and that collectively they will be the foundations of the earth and its treasures. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 8:294 (no. 449); Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām*, 218.

21 Al-Majlisī, *Mir’āt al-‘uqūl*, 4:50. The four essential categories of hadith are *ṣaḥīḥ* (“sound”), *ḥasan* (“good”), *muwaththaq* (“reliable/dependable”), and *ḍa‘īf* (“weak”). For descriptions of all four categories, see al-Shahīd al-Thānī, *Dirāyat al-Ḥadīth* (trans. Virjee), 25–8; Ahmad, “Twelver Ṣī‘ī *ḥadīth*,” 138–9; Afsaruddin, *Excellence and Precedence*, 204–6. A fifth category, *qawī* (“strong”), which comes between *muwaththaq* and *ḍa‘īf*, is not as common as the other four. See Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shī‘ī Law*, 5–6; al-Faḍlī, *Introduction to Hadīth*, 117.

22 On the four classical Shī‘ī *rijāl* works, namely, al-Kashshī’s (d. 367/ 978) *Kitāb ma‘rifat al-nāqilīn ‘an al-a‘imma al-ṣādiqīn*, available in a version abridged by al-Ṭūsī entitled *Ikhtiyār ma‘rifat al-rijāl*, al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-Rijāl*, al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb Fihrist kutub al-Shī‘a*, and al-Najāshī’s *Kitāb al-Rijāl*, see Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shī‘ī Law*, 5. On al-Kashshī, see Takim, “Kašši, Abu ‘Amr Moḥammad,” *Elr* (online).

23 Unless otherwise specified, “al-Majlisī” here and elsewhere refers to Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī and not to his father.

be considered *muwaththaq*, but if he transmitted the hadith after al-Kāzim's death, it should be deemed *ḍa'if*, since al-Baṭā'inī would have fabricated the hadith to support his claim that al-Kāzim was the Qā'im who had not died but was in hiding, though not in Iraq where he was imprisoned at the order of two Abbasid caliphs, but rather in Ṭayba (i.e., Medina) with thirty of his followers.

I now comment on the key phrases of this hadith:

'uzla: “and he will certainly be isolated during his *ghayba*”

'Uzla (synonyms: *khalwa*, *waḥda*, *infirād*, *inqiṭā'*) denotes withdrawing oneself from association with others and retiring into seclusion. It is similar to the concept of *i'tikāf* and implies seclusion, usually in a place of worship and often during Ramaḍān, to pray, remember God, meditate, and perform spiritual exercises or practices.²⁴ Not surprisingly, *'uzla* is used in a similar sense in Shī'ī sources.²⁵ However, in commenting on this hadith, Shī'ī scholars agree, in light of other hadiths, 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.²⁶

ghayba: “and he will certainly be isolated during his *ghayba*”

Some have understood Hadith 1 as referring only to the first *ghayba*, commonly referred to in later sources as the Lesser or Minor Occultation. In his

24 See Melchert, “Asceticism,” *EI*³ (online); Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:2036.

25 For example, a well-known hadith ascribed in different forms to the Prophet Muḥammad and Imam al-Ṣādiq states that “solitude is a mode of worshiping (God)” (*al-'uzla min al-'ibāda*). Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 74:185; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Mustadrak al-wasā'il*, 11:388 (no. 13337). This adage is also found in Sunnī works, e.g., Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 9:275.

26 In Shī'ī hadiths, the main justification for the *ghayba* is to safeguard the life of the Imam; the other reason is said to be known only by God. Several hadiths prohibit mentioning the Hidden Imam's name. According to a report narrated by an individual identified in later sources as one of the deputies (*wukalā'*) 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 'arafū l-makān dallū 'alayhi*). Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:333 (no. 2); Kohlberg, “Taqiyya in Shī'ī Theology and Religion,” 349. See also Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 103–6, 145; al-Shīrāzī, *Limādḥā l-ghayba*, 20–32. For a discussion of other representative hadiths, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 277.

remarks on this hadith in *al-Ḥāshiyā ‘alā uṣūl al-kāfi*, Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1033/1623–4 or 1036/1626–7)—widely considered the founder (*mu’assis*) or propagator (*murawwij*) of the Akhbārī school (depending on one’s view concerning its origins)—states that during the Minor Occultation the Hidden Imam likely lived in Medina, where he sought the company of thirty of his closest friends/initiates (*kāna yasta’nis bi-thalāthīn min awliyā’ihi*).²⁷ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Ṭurayḥī (d. 1087/1676–7), author of the important Shī’ī lexicon *Majma’ al-baḥrayn*,²⁸ and Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679), a Safavid polymath, shared his opinion that Hadith 1 applies to the Minor Occultation. Al-Kāshānī comments in his hadith compendium entitled *al-Wāfi* that “it seems that [this hadith] refers to (the Imam’s) short *ghayba* [that is, the Lesser Occultation] because during the long (*ghayba*) [i.e., the Greater Occultation], there is no way for his Shī’a to reach him.”²⁹ Al-Kāshānī’s statement that the Imam is unreachable during the Greater Occultation may appear odd in light of the fact that al-Kāshānī was among the authorities who transmit two popular and controversial stories (in his *Nawādir al-akhbār* and *Ilm al-yaqīn*) that describe Shī’a who traveled during the Greater Occultation to mysterious islands ruled by the Hidden Imam and his sons. Moreover, al-Kāshānī affirms the ontological reality of the “world of images” (*‘ālam al-mithāl*)³⁰ in

27 Al-Astarābādī, *al-Ḥāshiyā ‘alā uṣūl al-kāfi*, 161. Al-Astarābādī’s comments are cited verbatim in al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, 6:244. See also al-Majlisī, *Mir’āt al-‘uqūl*, 4:50–1. On al-Astarābādī, see Kohlberg, “Astarābādī, Moḥammad Amīn,” *Elr*, 2:845–6; Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, passim, esp. 31–139; Gleave, “Akhbāriyya and Uṣūliyya,” *EI*³ (online); Madelung, “Akhbāriyya,” *EI*², 12:56–7; Newman, “The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran. Part 1,” 22; Abisaab, “Was Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626–7) a Mujtahid?”; Abisaab, “Shī’ī Jurisprudence.” On *al-Ḥāshiyā ‘alā uṣūl al-kāfi*, see Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 37.

28 Al-Ṭurayḥī, *Majma’ al-baḥrayn*, 2:110. On this work, see Sulaymān, “Majma’ al-Baḥrayn,” *DMT*, 15:79–80.

29 [= *fa-inna fī l-ṭawīla laysa li-shī’atīhi ilayhi sabilun*] Al-Kāshānī, *al-Wāfi*, 2:416. Al-Kāshānī adds, “When [the Hidden Imam] isolated himself and hid in [Medina], thirty of his Shī’a were with him, keeping each other company. As a result, they were never lonely (*fa-lā waḥshata lahum*).”

30 The imaginal realm or world of images (*‘ālam al-mithāl*) interposed between the physical world and spiritual realm is traced to the teachings of the Persian philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), the founder of the school of Illuminationism (*al-ishrāq*). Elements were incorporated into Shī’ī thought by Ibn Abī Jūmhūr al-Aḥsā’ī (fl. ninth/fifteenth century) and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. ca. 1045/1635–6), among others. See Madelung, “Ibn Abī Ḡumhūr al-Aḥsā’ī’s Synthesis,” 149; Lawson, “Ebn Abi Jomhūr Aḥsā’ī,” *Elr*, 7:662–3; Rahman, “Dream, Imagination and *‘Ālam al-mithāl*,” 409–19. On the *‘ālam al-mithāl* as the location of the Hidden Imam in later Shī’ī (viz., Shaykhī) thought, see al-Aḥsā’ī, *Kitāb al-*

his *Kalimāt-i maknūna* as the realm where “the Holy Imams [including presumably the Hidden Imam] are present when they appear before a dying person.”³¹ It is possible that al-Kāshānī believed that whereas the generality of Shī‘a could not reach the Imam during the Greater Occultation, a special group could and in fact have encountered the Imam; this is reflected in the accounts he chose to transmit and the interpretation he advances about Hadith 2 (see below).

Most scholars, however, interpreted this hadith as applying to the Greater Occultation. For example, according to Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarānī (d. 1080/1669 or 1081/1670),³² the locution “and he will certainly be isolated dur-

Raj‘a, 92; al-Aḥsā‘ī and al-Rashtī, *Asrār al-imām al-mahdī*, 110; al-Rashtī, *Risālat al-ṭabīb*, 102; al-Rashtī, *Majma‘ al-rasā’il*, 46; Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4:286–91; Corbin, *Histoire*, 110–1 [= Corbin, *The History* (trans. Sherrard), 70–1]; Corbin, “Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality,” 405; Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam*, 138–9; Lawson, “The Authority of the Feminine,” 105; Lawson, “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy,” 135–6; Rafati, “The Development,” 107–9, 114; Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam*, 227; MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 616, 621–2; Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 50–3, 59; Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi‘ism*, 52; Bayat, *Mysticism*, 42–5; Hamid, “The Metaphysics,” 41–2; Eschraghi, *Frühe Šaiḥī*, 41–3; Ziai, “Dreams ii,” *Elr*, 7:550.

31 Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (trans. Pearson), 178, and discussed in Lawson, “Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā‘ī,” 26. On al-Kāshānī’s *Kalimāt-i maknūna*, see Lawson, “The Hidden Words of Fayḍ Kāshānī”; Zargar, “Revealing Revisions.” As Lawson points out elsewhere, al-Kāshānī does not speak of the possibility of encountering the Hidden Imam in the *‘ālam al-mithāl* while a believer is still alive. Lawson, “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy,” 136. The idea that the Imams appear to a dying person is a Shī‘ī axiom. As part of his survey of Shī‘ī doctrines, al-Majlisī, *al-I‘tiqādāt*, 27, mentions 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 another creedal work, he states that according to Shī‘ī hadiths, the tears that flow from the eyes of the believers when they die stem from the gladness and exultation they feel at the moment of death, when they behold the Prophet and the Imams (*min shiddat farāḥihim wa-surūrihīm bi-ru‘yātihim al-nabī wa-l-a‘imma*). Restating the traditional Ash‘arī *bi-lā kayfa* “solution,” al-Majlisī adds that it is not necessary to think about how this vision takes place (*wa-lā yalzam al-tafakkur fī kayfiyyat dhālik*), but he is quick to rule out esoteric interpretations by the mystically-inclined, who speak of *hūrqālyā* and the like in relation to the words of the Imams (*wa-lā yajūz al-ta‘wīl*). Al-Majlisī, *al-‘Aqā'id*, 67.

32 On him, see Ṣaḥrā‘ī, “Māzandarānī, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ b. Aḥmad,” *DMT*, 15:19. Al-Māzandarānī was a student of (among others) Muḥammad Taqī al-Majlisī (d. 1070/1659–60) and the polymath Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn Bahā‘ al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī, known as al-Shaykh al-Bahā‘ī (d. 1030/1621) (on whom, see Stewart, *At the Nexus of Traditions*), and a teacher of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī and al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī. His commentary on the *Uṣūl al-kāfi*

ing his *ghayba*” is a reference (*ishāra*) to the Greater Occultation, since it is widely believed that during the Greater Occultation, the Imam is isolated from everyone (*li-annahu ya'tazilu fihā l-nās jamī'an*). However, al-Māzandarānī is quick to add that in some manuscripts this sentence of Hadith 1 is missing the word *budda*; without *budda*, its meaning is the opposite: “and he will not be isolated during his *ghayba*” (*wa-lā lahu fī ghaybatihī min 'uzla*). He explains this divergent text by suggesting that the Imam lives among the people and sees them, while they cannot see him, despite the fact that they benefit from his presence among them.³³ It would seem that he prefers this version of the sentence, as it agrees with the purport of the hadiths introduced in chapter 1, “The Hidden Imam: Unseen and Unrecognized.”

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 Lesser Occultation.³⁴ Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī was confident in interpreting Hadith 1 to mean that in every generation throughout the Greater Occultation, “thirty believers attain [the Imam’s] presence.”³⁵ This interpretation was advanced by numerous scholars after al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī to defend their interpretation that thirty believers in any given age are privileged to be in contact with the Imam. In their view, this interpretation establishes the veracity of the stories of ulama who claimed to have contacted the Imam during the Greater Occultation. The prominent Iraqi cleric Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr (d. 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.”³⁶

Ṭayba: “Ṭayba is the best abode”

strongly criticizes Mullā Ṣadrā’s commentary. See Barārī-Fandarī, “Mullā Ṣāliḥ Māzandarānī,” esp. 108, and Kohlberg, “Kolayni,” *Elr* (online).

33 Al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfi*, 6:243–4.

34 Al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 2:301 (no. 228).

35 Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-mawā*, 148.

36 [= *hādhā l-khabar ... yuthbit anna jamā'a min al-nās fī kull jil ya'rifūna al-mahdī wa-yattaṣilūna bihi wa-yarfa'ūna 'anhu al-waḥsha*] Al-Ṣadr, *Tārīkh al-ghayba al-kubrā*, 68. Similarly, the Lebanese scholar Muḥammad Jamīl Ḥammūd (al-Āmili) argues that “while it is known that the elite *mawālī* who see [the Imam] during the Greater Occultation are not the Mahdī’s representatives or deputies, this hadith [stating that thirty believers have contact with the Imam] proves the veracity [of their claims].” Ḥammūd, *Abḥā l-murād fī sharḥ mu'tamar 'ulamā' Baghdād*, 2:677. On “the elite *mawālī*,” see below. See also al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 192, for a similar reading.

The vast majority of Shī'ī commentators of this hadith agree that Ṭayba refers to Medina (*madīnat al-nabī*).³⁷ According to classical Islamic sources, Ṭayba (lit., the “sweet-smelling”) was an honorific name bestowed on Medina by the Prophet Muḥammad.³⁸ This reference is affirmed by commentators who cite Hadith 1 as proof that just as Muḥammad lived in Medina, likewise the Hidden Imam resides in or around Medina during the *ghayba*.³⁹

In his comments on this hadith in *Mir'āt al-'uqūl*, widely recognized as “arguably the most useful and comprehensive commentary”⁴⁰ on *al-Kāfī*, al-Majlisī reasons that “(the Imam) is likely always in Medina or its environs [during the Greater Occultation] or was there during the Lesser Occultation. It has also been said that Ṭayba is the name of a different 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-Kāfī* in which al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, when asked where to look for his successor should something happen to him, answered, “in Medina.”⁴¹

Since Hadith 1 is almost certainly of Wāqifi provenance, it is not surprising to see Medina mentioned as the abode of the Qā'im. In addition to the city being the refuge of the Prophet from his adversaries, and perhaps more importantly, Medina was the birthplace of the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāzīm, and his residence for most of his life. As mentioned in chapter 1, al-Kāzīm lived in Medina all of his life, with two exceptions, that is, the times in which he was absent (*ghā'ib*) from his followers, in effect, in forced *ghayba*. After al-Kāzīm's death in Baghdad, the Wāqifis contended that al-Kāzīm was the Qā'im. Some Wāqifis likely pointed to (or in fact created) Hadith 1 at this time to declare that al-Ṣādiq or al-Bāqir had previously prophesied that al-Kāzīm as the Qā'im would not die but instead return to Medina and be accompanied by thirty of his closest followers.

The number thirty: “the thirty are never lonely”

The meaning of this critical though enigmatic phrase is unclear. Shī'ī sources commonly number the Qā'im's companions as 313, the same number of men

37 Al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd* (trans. Davānī), 930.

38 Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, 1:56; Watt, “al-Madīna,” *ET*², 5:994.

39 Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:158 [= al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd* (trans. Davānī), 933]. Cf. al-Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-'uqūl*, 4:50, where he reads al-Ṭayba as al-Ṭība.

40 Kohlberg, “Kolayni,” *EI*r (online). On *Mir'āt al-'uqūl*, see Anūshih, “*Mir'āt al-'uqūl*,” *DMT*, 15:234–5.

41 This hadith is recorded in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:328 (no. 2). See also al-Mas'ūdī (attrib.), *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, 229.

who, according to Shīʿī sources, fought alongside the Prophet Muḥammad at the Battle of Badr.⁴² What then, is the significance of the number thirty? Schimmel observes that in Judeo-Christian sources, the number thirty is connected with ideas of order and justice,⁴³ two principles that are closely connected to the Qāʾim. A more likely explanation can be found in the Shīʿī sources themselves. Two significant hadiths mention the number thirty in the context of the companions of the seventh Imam and the Prophet Muḥammad. According to the first report, al-Kāẓim disclosed to a group of thirty presumably elite followers that his son, ʿAlī (al-Riḍā), was his successor.⁴⁴ More importantly, according to the second report, the day the Prophet died, it is said that there were precisely thirty companions by his side. This report features prominently in a work attributed to Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī (d. 76/695–6), a putative follower of ʿAlī from Kufa.⁴⁵

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

In other words, [the Imam] is with thirty of his *mawālī* and elite followers (*khawāṣṣiḥi*). They never feel lonely for they keep each other company

42 The fact that 313 is also the *abjad* numerical value of the word *jaysh* (army) is not a coincidence. 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 Qāʾim, their number [i.e., the number of soldiers in the army of wrath], 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 occurring in this chapter and ascribed to al-Ṣādiq states that even if all the people of the world abandon the Qāʾim, God will enable his companions (*aṣḥābuhu*), who have been preserved for him (*maḥfūzātun lahu*), to reach and support 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 hadiths cited by Shīʿī 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 Qāʾim’s appearance from *ghayba* and not before. On the Battle of Badr, see Athamina, “Badr,” *EI*³ (online).

43 Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers*, 239–40.

44 Al-Masʿūdī (attrib.), *Ithbāt al-waṣṣīyya*, 204.

45 Al-Hilālī, *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī*, 794; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 22:398. On al-Hilālī and his work, see Djebli, “Sulaym b. Qays,” *EI*², 9:818–9; Dakake, “Writing and Resistance,” 186–93. Both Shīʿī and non-Shīʿī scholars have raised doubts about the authenticity of this work; nonetheless, it has been cited by numerous Shīʿī scholars through the centuries. See Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya,” 532–3; Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 101; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 82–6; al-Sayyārī, *Revelation and Falsification*, 243 n. 567; and Amir-Moezzi, “Note Bibliographique.”

(*laysa lahum waḥsha li-istīnās ba‘dihim bi-ba‘dīn*). By contrast, [it could be that the Imam himself] is one of the thirty and thus never feels alone. A [third] possibility is that [the preposition] *bā’* [in the phrase, *wa-mā bi-thalāthīn min waḥsha*] denotes “with” (*ma‘a*) [rather than “in”], to mean that he never feels alone because he is with thirty [other people, though not necessarily his elite followers].

It has also been said that this hadith means that [the Imam] has the appearance of someone who is thirty years old, for [at this age],⁴⁶ a person [is old enough to] not feel lonely, even if he is far [from everyone else] (*wa-man kāna kadhālika lā yastawḥishu fa-huwa fī ghāyat al-bu‘d*).⁴⁷

In commenting on this hadith in his *Biḥār al-anwār*, al-Majlisī argues that “when one of the thirty dies, someone else takes his place.”⁴⁸ In his Persian *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, al-Majlisī explicitly states that “during the *ghayba*, it is possible for some of the Shī‘a to attain [the Imam’s] presence.” To support this assertion, he alludes to the above hadith which he says affirms “that thirty of his elite [followers] (*sī nafar az makḥṣūṣān*) are perpetually in [the Imam’s] service. In other words (*ya‘nī*), when one [of these thirty followers] dies, another [follower] takes his place.”⁴⁹

Later sources state that the thirty are in fact a category of *awliyā’* (intimate friends or initiates). Commenting on this hadith in his *Kitāb al-Raj‘a*, Aḥmad al-Aḥsā‘ī (d. 1241/1826)⁵⁰ employs terminology common to descriptions of the Sufi hierarchical order of *awliyā’* in stating that thirty refers to the thirty sub-

46 Here he is likely referring to the opinion of his teacher al-Māzandarānī: “It has been said, it is possible that this hadith means that he always appears as someone who is thirty years old, for a person does not feel lonely at that age (*wa-mā fī hādihā l-sinn min waḥsha*), but God knows best.” Al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfi*, 6:244.

47 Al-Majlisī, *Mir‘āt al-‘uqūl*, 4:50–1. A Persian summary of al-Majlisī’s explanation is provided by Fahrī-Zanjānī in his translation of al-Nu‘mānī’s *al-Ghayba*. Al-Nu‘mānī, *Ghaybat-i Nu‘mānī* (trans. Fahrī-Zanjānī), 220–1.

48 [= *in māta aḥaduhum qāma ākharu maqāmahu*] Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:158 [= al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw‘ūd* (trans. Davānī), 933]. Al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:854, also maintains this view.

49 Al-Majlisī, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 345–6. Muṣṭafavī advances a similar interpretation, namely that thirty, or twenty-nine (if we include the Imam himself), of the Imam’s companions (*aṣḥāb*) are with him during his *ghayba*. Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-kāfi* (trans. Muṣṭafavī), 2:140 (no. 16).

50 On him, see Lawson, “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy,” 128–9; MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 59–106, 607–18; Hamid, “Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā‘ī.”

stitutes (*abdāl*)⁵¹ and chiefs (*nuqabā'*)⁵² that are in the company of the Hidden Imam.⁵³ While he does not state this explicitly, al-Aḥsā'ī appears to be referring to a hadith ascribed to al-Bāqir prophesying that some three hundred believers will take an oath of allegiance to the Qā'im when he appears at the Ka'ba, and among these believers will be *nuqabā'* from Egypt, *abdāl* from Syria, and *akhyār* (outstanding people) from Iraq.⁵⁴

Hasan Urūmiyyih-ī (d. after 1260/1844), who translated volume 13 of al-Majlisī's *Bihār al-anwār* on the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam into Persian, commented that "[the Imam's] home during the days of *ghayba* is [in Medina]," and added that "it appears that the thirty people refers to the 'Men of the Unseen' (*rijāl al-ghayb*) who are in the service of the Imam during the *ghayba*."⁵⁵

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- 51 There are differences of opinion about the number of the *abdāl*. In his well-known Sufi handbook, the Persian mystic 'Alī al-Hujwīrī (d. between 465/1072 and 469/1077) states they are forty in number. See Awn, "Sufism," *ER*, 13:8821. The famous Andalusian philosopher and mystic Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240) states that there are only seven *abdāl* in any given age. See I. Goldziher and H.J. Kissling, "Abdāl," *ET*². On the absorption of the term *abdāl* into later Shī'ī sources, see J. Chabbi, "Abdāl," *ELr*, 1:173–4; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, 110–19; Corbin, *The History of Islamic Philosophy*, 72. On the position of the *nujabā'* and *nuqabā'* in later Shaykhī discourse, in particular the writings of Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1871), see Bayat, *Mysticism*, 66–7, 76; MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 24–5, 29.
- 52 The *nuqabā'* of the Hidden Imam are referred to in an early hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq and found in al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi*, 8:167 (no. 185) and appear to refer to an elite body of initiates: "[When he appears], the Qā'im will take out a book (*kitāban*) which has been sealed with a golden seal (*makhtūm bi-khātam min dhahab*). He will tear off [the seal] and read to the people from [this book]. They will become startled and scatter away from him like frightened sheep. Only his *nuqabā'* will remain." Cf. a slightly different version of this hadith in al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 610 (no. 25); al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 52:326 (no. 42); al-Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ al-ziyāra*, 3:77.
- 53 Al-Aḥsā'ī, *Kitāb al-Raj'a*, 92. Cf. Lawson, *Tafsīr as Mystical Experience*, 87. The *abdāl* interpretation is also advanced by Ḥammūd, *Abḥā l-murād fī sharḥ mu'tamar 'ulamā' Baghdād*, 2:677.
- 54 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 477. A similar hadith ascribed to 'Alī states that the *nujabā'* are from Kufa and the *abdāl* are from Syria. Al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī*, 31.
- 55 Al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:748. The *rijāl al-ghayb* is another name for the *abdāl*. See Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, 110–1. In his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, Ibn al-'Arabī frequently speaks about the "men of the unseen" as 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 to [ordinary human] vision," [Ibn al-'Arabī], *The Meccan Revelations* (trans. Morris), 1:73, 254 n. 30. Ibn al-'Arabī recounts two personal experiences of encounters with such spiritual beings, both of whom were strangers and one of whom was Persian. [Ibn al-'Arabī], *The Meccan Revelations* (trans. Morris), 1:90–1, 271–2 nn. 119–21. Cf. the adoption of the term *rijāl al-ghayb* by leaders of the Shaykhī school to designate an occult spiritual hierarchy. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4:276; Amir-Moezzi, "An Absence Filled with Presences," 42–4.

The prolific Quran commentator and cleric Muḥammad Muḥammadī Ishtihārdī (d. 2006) interprets this hadith to mean that “besides his wife and children, a group of his friends who, according to a hadith, are thirty of his ‘supports’ (*awtād*) and prominent disciples, are always (*hamvāriḥ*) in his service.”⁵⁶ Since this statement follows his discussion of the famous encounter story of the Green Island in the White Sea, it appears that the special friends to whom Ishtihārdī refers 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, desolation, and sadness arising from these states) is derived from *waḥsh* (pl. *wuḥūsh*), meaning wild beasts of the desert.⁵⁷ *Waḥsha* is the antonym of *uns* (companionship) and shares semantic properties with *waḥda* (loneliness), *khawf* (fear), and *hamm* (concern). As an example of its usage in classical Arabic literature, the lexicographer Ibn al-Zabīdī cites the expression, *akhadhathu al-waḥsha*: “sadness arising from loneliness or solitude laid hold upon him.”⁵⁸ In Arabic sources, *laylat al-waḥsha* (also called *laylat al-waḥda*) is the first night after the burial of a loved one. In Shīʿī sources, the night of ʿĀshūrā (the eve of 11 Muḥarram) is called *laylat al-waḥsha* since on this night, believers remember and mourn the plight of the survivors of Karbala who spent the night fearful in the desert.⁵⁹ Moreover, *waḥsha* appears in a significant hadith ascribed to Imam al-Riḍā about al-Khiḍr’s relationship to the Hidden Imam (note the similarities between this and the Qāʾim’s appearance during the pilgrimage, as discussed in the hadiths presented in the previous chapter):

Al-Khiḍr 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 then he is 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 Qāʾim company (*sa-yuʿnis bihi waḥshat*

56 Ishtihārdī, *Ḥaḍrat-i mahdī*, 53.

57 Cf. Quran 81:5, the only verse in the Quran in which a word from the *wāw-ḥā-shūn* root occurs.

58 Al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, 9:221. See also Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:2929–30.

59 Muḥaddithī, *Mawsūʿat ʿĀshūrā*, 392 (entry on *laylat al-waḥsha*).

qā'imīnā) [lit., through him, God will accompany the loneliness of our Qā'im] during his *ghayba* and protect him from loneliness (*wa-yaṣil bihi waḥdatahu*).⁶⁰

Commenting on the phrase, “the thirty are never lonely,” Jalālī maintains that “with the thirty people that are near him, [the Imam] prevents fear and worry from entering [his heart].”⁶¹

2 Hadith 2 (and Variants): “[and] no one will know his location except the elite of his *mawālī*”

The second hadith (henceforth, Hadith 2) that some later scholars cite as proof that it is possible to contact the Imam during the Greater Occultation is, like Hadith 1, first encountered in al-Kulaynī's *Uṣūl al-kāfi*:

Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā⁶² < Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn⁶³ < [Ḥasan] b. Maḥbūb⁶⁴ < Ishāq b. 'Ammār [al-Ṣayrafī]⁶⁵ < al-Ṣādiq:

مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَحْيَىٰ عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ عَنِ ابْنِ
مُحِبُّوبٍ عَنْ إِسْحَاقَ بْنِ عَمَّارٍ قَالَ قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ
اللَّهِ

60 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 362 (no. 4). Also cited in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:152 (no. 3) [= al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd* (trans. Davānī), 929]. A similar hadith, attributed to al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, is first encountered in al-Rāwandī's *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'ih*, 3:173 (no. 68), and later in al-Nilī's *Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍī'a*, 75. The phrase, *wa-yaṣil bihi waḥdatahu*, is similar to a sentence found in a Shī'ī supplication recited when a dead body is prepared for burial: “O God! Be Thou his companion, befriend him in his loneliness (*ānis waḥshatahu*), and dispel his solitude through Thy mercy” Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 79:30. Another version of the same supplication is cited in al-Ṭūsī, *Miṣbāḥ al-muḥtahid*, 21.

61 [= *bā sī tan kih dar kinār-i ūyand, bīm va harāsī bih khud rāh nimidahad*] Al-Ṭūsī, *Khūrshīd dar nahān* (trans. Jalālī), 1:231.

62 On him, see Newman, *The Formative Period*, index, s.v. “Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-'Aṭṭār al-Ash'arī al-Qummi.”

63 Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī l-Khaṭṭāb al-Zayyāt (d. 262/876). On him, see Newman, *The Formative Period*, 68; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, index, s.v. “Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Abī 'l-Khaṭṭāb.”

64 Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb al-Sarrād or al-Zarrād (d. 224/838–9), author of the work *Kitāb al-Mashyakha* on the subject of the *ghayba* (which has not survived), was a companion of Imams al-Kāzim, al-Riḍā, and al-Jawād, and considered trustworthy by authors of early Shī'ī *rijāl* works. See Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya,” 531–2; Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 264; Takim, “The *Rijāl* of the Shī'ī Imāms,” 216; Hussain, *The Occultation*, 4, 6; Ḥā'iri, “Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb Sarrād,” *DMT*, 6:302.

65 Abū Ya'qūb Ishāq b. 'Ammār b. Ḥayyān (d. ca. 181/798) was an important and trusted

The Qā'im 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 Shī'a, while during the other, no one will know his location except the elite of his *mawālī*.⁶⁶

لِلْقَائِمِ غَيْبَتَانِ إِحْدَاهُمَا قَصِيرَةٌ وَالْأُخْرَى طَوِيلَةٌ
الْغَيْبَةُ الْأُولَى لَا يَعْلَمُ بِمَكَانِهِ فِيهَا إِلَّا خَاصَّةُ شِيعَتِهِ
وَالْأُخْرَى لَا يَعْلَمُ بِمَكَانِهِ فِيهَا إِلَّا خَاصَّةُ مَوَالِيهِ

Al-Nu'mānī records the same hadith in his *Kitāb al-Ghayba* (completed in 342/954), stating that he heard it directly from al-Kulaynī, though in al-Nu'mānī work, the words “in his faith” (*fī dīnīhi*) are added to the end of the hadith's *matn*:

al-Kulaynī < Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā < Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn < Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb < Ishāq b. 'Ammār < al-Ṣādiq:

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ يَعْقُوبَ عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ يَحْيَى عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ
بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ عَنِ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ مَجْبُوبٍ عَنْ إِسْحَاقَ بْنِ
عَمَّارٍ قَالَ قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع)

The Qā'im 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 Shī'a, while during the other, no one will know his location except the elite of his *mawālī* in his faith.⁶⁷

لِلْقَائِمِ غَيْبَتَانِ إِحْدَاهُمَا قَصِيرَةٌ وَالْأُخْرَى طَوِيلَةٌ
الْغَيْبَةُ الْأُولَى لَا يَعْلَمُ بِمَكَانِهِ فِيهَا إِلَّا خَاصَّةُ شِيعَتِهِ
وَالْأُخْرَى لَا يَعْلَمُ بِمَكَانِهِ فِيهَا إِلَّا خَاصَّةُ مَوَالِيهِ فِي
دِينِهِ

Al-Nu'mānī also cites a similar hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq:

early hadith transmitter from al-Ṣādiq who (at one point) is said to have entertained doctrines that were deemed “extreme” by later Imāmī Shī'a, who considered themselves “moderate.” On the problem of using the term *ghulāt* (lit., “exaggerators”), see Hodgson, “How did the Early Shī'a become Sectarian?” 4–5; al-Qāḍī, “The Development of the Term *Ghulāt*,” 295–319. On Ibn Ḥayyān, see Halm, “Das ‘Buch der Schatten’ [1],” 241–2; Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, 81; Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 299 (no. 111).

66 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:340 (no. 19). Also cited in al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:58; Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya,” 532.

67 Al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 175 (no. 2); al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 2:302 (no. 230).

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Saʿīd b. ʿUqda (d. 333/944–5)⁶⁸ < ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan al-Taymulī (d. 224/838–9)⁶⁹ < ʿUmar b. ʿUthmān < Ibn Maḥbūb < Ishāq b. ʿAmmār al-Ṣayrafī < al-Ṣādiq:

حَدَّثَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ بْنِ سَعِيدِ بْنِ عَقْدَةَ قَالَ
حَدَّثَنَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ الْحَسَنِ التَّمِيمِيُّ عَنْ عُمَرَ بْنِ عُثْمَانَ
عَنِ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ مَجْزُوبٍ عَنْ إِسْحَاقَ بْنِ عَمَّارٍ
الصَّرِفِيِّ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) يَقُولُ

The Qā'im 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 Shī'a will know his location, while during the other, no one will know his location except the elite of his *mawālī* in his faith.⁷⁰

لِلْقَائِمِ غَيْبَتَانِ إِحْدَاهُمَا طَوِيلَةٌ وَالْأُخْرَى قَصِيرَةٌ
فَالْأُولَى يَعْلَمُ بِمَكَانِهِ فِيهَا خَاصَّةٌ مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ
وَالْأُخْرَى لَا يَعْلَمُ بِمَكَانِهِ فِيهَا إِلَّا خَاصَّةٌ مَوَالِيهِ
فِي دِينِهِ

Al-Ḥalabī (d. 447/1055) cites a similar hadith on the authority of Ishāq b. ʿAmmār with two noticeable differences: (1) his version does not contain the second part of the hadith, and (2) the term *awliyā'* is used, as opposed to Shī'a or *mawālī*: "The Qā'im will have two *ghaybas*, one short and the other long. For the first one, his place will be known, especially to his intimate friends/initiates."⁷¹

Interestingly, the two versions of this hadith cited by al-Majlisī in *Bihār al-anwār* are markedly different. One version reads, "The Qā'im 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*."⁷² In this version, 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-Majlisī is even more puzzling. Here, the negative particle *illā* is left out, generating a radically different meaning: "The Qā'im will have two *ghaybas*. One of them will be long, while the other will be short. During the first, [only] the most privileged of his Shī'a

68 Known as Ibn ʿUqda. On him, see al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 94 (no. 233); Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, index, s.v. "Ibn ʿUqda."

69 Abū Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Faḍḍāl al-Kūfī al-Taymulī, a transmitter of hadith from al-Kāẓim and al-Riḍā. On him, see al-Sayyārī, *Revelation and Falsification*, 62 n. 17.

70 Al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 175 (no. 1); al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 2:301 (no. 229); Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 210 n. 16; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin* 327–8 n. 711.

71 [= *yu'lam makānuhu khāṣṣatan li-awliyā'ihī*] Al-Ḥalabī, *Taqrib al-ma'ārif*, 431.

72 Al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 52:155 (no. 11) [= al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:750–1].

will know his location, while during the other, not even the elite of his *mawālī* in his faith will know his location.”⁷³

2.1 *Hadith 2: Comments*

Like Hadith 1, Hadith 2 is also of Wāqifi origin. Although none of the names mentioned in the *isnād* are identified as Wāqifi in *rijāl* works, at least one, namely al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb, transmitted numerous hadiths from the Wāqifi ‘Alī b. Abī Ḥamza al-Baṭā’ini⁷⁴ and consequently, al-Ṭūsī called his authority into question.⁷⁵ Moreover, Hadith 2 is clearly modeled after a different Wāqifi hadith that al-Ṭūsī has preserved: “Abū l-Ḥasan [that is, Mūsā al-Kāẓim] will have two *ghaybas*. One of them will be short, and the other will be long.”⁷⁶

Based on reading Hadith 2 (the version found in al-Nu‘mānī), which states that “the first *ghayba* will ... be the longer one,” Kohlberg argues 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.”⁷⁷ Hadith 2 does state that one of the two *ghaybas* will be longer, though it does not necessarily clarify that it is the first. More importantly, elsewhere in al-Nu‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, where this version of Hadith 2 is first cited, al-Nu‘mānī is adamant that “the short *ghayba*” (*al-ghayba al-qaṣīra*) has ended and that he is writing during the long [what came to be known later as the greater] *ghayba*.

In Hadith 2, the meaning of the word *khāṣṣa* is of particular importance. In early Shī‘ī sources, the Shī‘a are often called *al-khāṣṣa* (“the elite”) while the

73 Al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 52:155 (no. 10). The editors of *Bihār al-anwār* have “corrected” this anomaly by placing the word *illā* back into the hadith in brackets and referencing the published edition of al-Nu‘mānī’s *al-Ghayba*, but it is entirely possible that al-Majlisī relied on an earlier manuscript of al-Nu‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba*. It merits noting that in the two published Persian translations of al-Majlisī’s work, both translators rendered the hadith the way it was preserved by al-Majlisī without observing any problems. Thus, Urūmiyyih-ī translates the last part of the hadith as “In the short *ghayba*, the elite (*khāṣṣān*) of [his] Shī‘a know his location while in the other, not even the elite are aware [of his location].” Al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw‘ūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:750. Davānī’s translation is similar: “During the first [short] *ghayba*, the elite of his Shī‘a know his location, but during the second [long] *ghayba*, not even his special friends (*dūstān-i makhṣūs-i ū*) know where he is.” Al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw‘ūd* (trans. Davānī), 930.

74 See, for example, al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, 216 (no. 380); al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 435; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 23:4 (no. 81); 52:214 (no. 69); 52:354 (no. 115).

75 Al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār ma‘rifat al-rijāl*, 2:799 (no. 989).

76 [= *ihdāhumā taqill wa-l-ukhrā taṭūl*] Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 57; Kohlberg, “From Imām-iyya,” 532 n. 78; Klemm, “Die vier *sufarā*,” 142.

77 Kohlberg, “From Imām-iyya,” 528. The same reading of this hadith is found in Momen, *An Introduction to Shī‘i Islam*, 75.

non-Shī'a (and especially Sunnīs) are labeled *al-ʿamma* (“the commoners” or “the regular, ordinary folk”).⁷⁸ However, in works such as al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī's (d. 290/903) *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, the early Shī'i community is divided into two circles. The majority of the Shī'a constitute the *ʿamma*, while a prestigious minority or inner circle make up the *khāṣṣa*, a qualified spiritual elite who were initiated into secret knowledge and esoteric doctrines that were kept from the *ʿamma*, and who were charged with “la garde du secret,” to quote Amir-Moezzi's perceptive translation of *taqīyya*.⁷⁹ According to a report found in *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, the tenth Imam concealed himself from all but a handful of his elite Shī'a (*ʿadad yasīr min khawāṣṣihi*), and al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī spoke with his elite followers and others from behind a veil. It is said that the Imams acted in this fashion to prepare the believers for the *ghayba* of the Qā'im, so that the Imam's concealment would become a routine matter and they would not reject the *ghayba*.⁸⁰ My translation of *khāṣṣa* as “elite followers” follows Amir-Moezzi, who renders *khāṣṣa* as “l'élite des croyants”⁸¹ and argues that the expression *khāṣṣat shī'atihi* “désigne sans doute les quatre ‘représentants’ (*nā'ib/wakīl/safīr*) de l'imam cache pendant l'Occultation mineure,”⁸² since, according to tradition, they alone knew the location of the Imam. It is important to note, however, that Amir-Moezzi is here expressing a later interpretation of Hadith 2, given that, as mentioned, the institution of *sifāra* (“emissaryhood”) is not explicitly defined in any of the works that have survived from the Lesser Occultation.

Seeing as Hadith 1 and Hadith 2 are recorded in al-Kulaynī's *Uṣūl al-kāfi* (unlike Hadith 3 below), it is useful to briefly discuss a commentary on *al-Kāfi* that has not yet been mentioned: the incomplete commentary of the renowned

78 Kohlberg, “ʿĀmma,” *Elr*, 1:976–7; Kohlberg, *Belief and Law*, 8; M.A.J. Beg, “al-Khāṣṣa wa'l-ʿĀmma,” *Elr*²; Floor, “Kāṣṣa,” *Elr*, 16:106–12; Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 11–2, 159–60; Mahdīpūr, “Khāṣṣah va ʿĀmmah,” *DJI* (online). In one of the accounts of an encounter with the Hidden Imam from the Lesser Occultation, the Imam tells ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahzīyār al-Ahwāzī that were it not for the repentance of some of the Shī'a, everyone on earth would be killed “except the elite few of the Shī'a whose words resemble their deeds” (*illā khawāṣṣ al-shī'a alladhīna tushbihu aqwāluhum af'ālahum*). Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il al-imāma*, 154. Cf. al-Bahrānī, *Madīnat al-ma'ājiz*, 8:118, where it is cited with slight differences; al-Bahrānī, *Tabṣīrat al-walī*, 146.

79 Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 221. See also Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 185.

80 Al-Mas'ūdī (attrib.), *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, 272; al-Ṣadr, *al-Mahdī*, 181–2. On the attribution of *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya* to al-Mas'ūdī, see Anṣārī, *Barrasīhā-yi tārikhī*, 875–85.

81 Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 74 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 29].

82 Amir-Moezzi, “Fin du Temps,” 62; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin* 328 n. 711; Amir-Moezzi, “Eschatology iii: In Imami Shi'ism,” *Elr*, 8:579. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 133, where the words “sans doute” are left out.

Safavid philosopher Mullā Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā) (d. ca. 1045/1635–6).⁸³ While a rigorous analysis of Ṣadrā's views on the Hidden Imam remains a desideratum,⁸⁴ some notes about his comments on these hadiths can be mentioned.

Although Ṣadrā chose not to gloss Hadith 1 and Hadith 2 directly, in the chapter of his work concerning hadiths about the Qā'im and his *ghayba*, he states that the Qā'im was named *al-qā'im* "because he exists (*mawjūd*)⁸⁵ ... 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." Here Ṣadrā appears to be reading *qā'im* in a sense that is closer to the meaning of the divine name, *qayyūm* ("self-subsisting"; cf. Quran 2:255). Then he contends, in a possible echo of his signature philosophical theory of "transubstantial motion" and "essential movement" (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*), that "the substance/essence of (the Qā'im's) spirit is not separate from [his] body (*laysa anna jawhar rūḥihi muḥāraqun 'an al-jasad*); rather, he is [constantly] eating, drinking, talking, moving, resting, walking, sitting and writing." In other words, the Qā'im is not essentially stable but rather, like the rest of reality and all of creation, he undergoes flux and is continually renewed and recreated by God.⁸⁶

Concerning the *ghayba* of the Imam, Ṣadrā specifically 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 the sky. Anyone who rejects the fact that the Mahdī exists today or thinks that it is

83 On Ṣadrā, see Rahman, "Mullā Ṣadrā," *ER*, 9:6231–4, though he does not mention Ṣadrā's commentary on the *Uṣūl*; Rizvi, "Mollā Ṣadrā Ṣhīrāzī," *Elr* (online); Rizvi, "Reconsidering the Life of Mullā Ṣadrā," 181–201. The *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfi* was one of his later works. Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy*, 36, points out that it was written after he had completed his commentaries on various suras of the Quran. On *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfi*, see Dakake, "Hierarchies of Knowing in Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on *al-Kāfi*"; Kaukua, "The Intellect in Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on the *Uṣūl al-kāfi*." Another important philosophical commentary on *al-Kāfi* by Muḥammad al-Bāqir Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1630), *al-Rawāshīḥ al-samāwīyya fi sharḥ aḥādīth al-imāmiyya*, does not contain any comments on the hadiths about the *ghayba*.

84 Studies in Persian include the short descriptive articles of Mamdūḥī, "Ḥaḍrat-i Mahdī-i" and Sa'ādī, "Imām-i Mahdī." On the general role of the Imam in Ṣadrā's worldview as "a microcosmic disclosure of God and cosmos," though without any reference to the Hidden Imam, see Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics*, 128–30; Dehbashi, *Transubstantial Motion*, 24–5.

85 The word Qā'im is the active participle of the verb *qāma*, meaning "to rise," but Qā'im can also be translated as "the one who exists," since the English word "exist" is etymologically traced to the Latin "existō," meaning, like *qāma*, "to stand forth, to arise, to be."

86 On Ṣadrā's theory, see Dehbashi, *Transubstantial Motion*, esp. 57–9.

inconceivable that he could live so long suffers from deficient knowledge, weak faith, and inadequate awareness of the nature [of the *ghayba*].⁸⁷

Elsewhere, he states that

in investigating the reality of this matter and others like it, we have pursued a fastidious methodology and a meticulous approach. This is not the place to go into the details,⁸⁸ but briefly, we have alluded to it earlier in our statement that the quiddity of his existence and his being alive in the realm of the earth (*‘ālam al-ard*) is the same as Jesus existing and living in the sky.

It appears that Ṣadrā is not speaking about the physical earth and sky in this passage. Immediately following this comment, he integrates a long excerpt from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s (d. 638/1240) *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, without an introduction or any indication that he is citing from that work, about “the earth of worship” (*ard al-‘ibāda*), thus suggesting that this is what he means by the “realm of the earth” as the abode of the Hidden Imam.⁸⁹ Ṣadrā’s interpretation, like his entire philosophical system, is innovative, though the influence of Ibn al-‘Arabī here and elsewhere is discernible. I have not come across any references in Ṣadrā’s published writings to the stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam, in contrast, for example, to the works of his student al-Kāshānī. Ṣadrā chose not to comment directly on any of the reports found in al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī* about believers who had seen the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation.

3 Hadith 3 (and Variants): “except the *mawlā* who is in charge of his affairs”

The third and final hadith (henceforth, Hadith 3) invoked by some Shī‘ī scholars to defend the veracity of stories of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation is ascribed to al-Ṣādiq and transmitted on the authority of his well-known disciple al-Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar al-Ju‘fī (fl. late second/eighth

87 Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfī*, 1:558. Ṣadrā then cites, presumably with approval, via his teacher, al-Shaykh al-Bahā‘ī, a lengthy passage from chapter 366 of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* concerning the Mahdī and his helpers. He does so without any further comments of his own. Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-karīm*, 5:76, also affirms the doctrine of “return” (*raj‘a*), said to take place at the time of the appearance of the Qā‘im.

88 [= *wa-lanā fī taḥqīq ḥādihā l-marām wa-amthālihi maslakun anīqun wa-manhajun daqīqun laysa hāhunā mawḍi‘ tafṣīlihi*]

89 Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-kāfī*, 1:564.

century, d. before 179/795–6).⁹⁰ This hadith is not found in any of the Shī'ī works that have survived from the time of the Lesser Occultation. In fact, the earliest extant work in which it appears is al-Nu'mānī's *Kitāb al-Ghayba*. Two attestations are cited in al-Ṭūsī's *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, henceforth, al-Ṭūsī (A) and al-Ṭūsī (B). For ease of comparison, all three hadiths are presented in the following table:

al-Ṭūsī (B) من كتاب الغيبة للطوسي (ب)	al-Ṭūsī (A) من كتاب الغيبة للطوسي (أ)	from al-Nu'mānī's <i>al-Ghayba</i> من كتاب الغيبة للنعماني
قَالَ وَرَوَى إِبْرَاهِيمُ بْنُ الْمُسْتَنِيرِ عَنِ الْمَفْضَلِ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) يَقُولُ	أَخْبَرَنَا إِدْرِيسُ عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ عَنِ الْفَضْلِ بْنِ شَاذَانَ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ جَبَلَةَ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ الْمُسْتَنِيرِ عَنِ الْمَفْضَلِ بْنِ عُمَرَ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع) يَقُولُ	وَأَخْبَرَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا الْقَاسِمُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ بْنِ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ حَازِمٍ مِنْ كِتَابِهِ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا عَيْبَسُ بْنُ هِشَامٍ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ جَبَلَةَ عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ بْنِ الْمُسْتَنِيرِ عَنِ الْمَفْضَلِ بْنِ عُمَرَ الْجَعْفِيِّ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الصَّادِقِ (ع) قَالَ
إِنَّ لَصَاحِبَ هَذَا الْأَمْرِ غَيْبَتَيْنِ أَحَدَاهُمَا أَطْوَلُ مِنَ الْأُخْرَى حَتَّى يُقَالَ مَاتَ وَبَعْضُ يَقُولُ قُتِلَ	إِنَّ لَصَاحِبِ هَذَا الْأَمْرِ غَيْبَتَيْنِ أَحَدَاهُمَا تَطْوُلُ حَتَّى يَقُولُ بَعْضُهُمْ مَاتَ وَيَقُولُ بَعْضُهُمْ قُتِلَ وَيَقُولُ بَعْضُهُمْ ذَهَبَ	إِنَّ لَصَاحِبِ هَذَا الْأَمْرِ غَيْبَتَيْنِ أَحَدَاهُمَا تَطْوُلُ حَتَّى يَقُولُ بَعْضُهُمْ مَاتَ وَبَعْضُهُمْ يَقُولُ قُتِلَ وَبَعْضُهُمْ يَقُولُ ذَهَبَ
فَلَا يَبْقَى عَلَى أَمْرِهِ إِلَّا نَفْرَسِيرٌ مِنْ أَصْحَابِهِ وَلَا يُطْلَعُ أَحَدٌ عَلَى مَوْضِعِهِ وَأَمْرُهُ وَلَا غَيْرُهُ إِلَّا الْمَوْلَى الَّذِي يَلِي أَمْرَهُ	حَتَّى لَا يَبْقَى عَلَى أَمْرِهِ مِنْ أَصْحَابِهِ إِلَّا نَفْرَسِيرٌ لَا يُطْلَعُ عَلَى مَوْضِعِهِ أَحَدٌ مِنْ وُلْدِهِ وَلَا غَيْرِهِ إِلَّا الْمَوْلَى الَّذِي يَلِي أَمْرَهُ	فَلَا يَبْقَى عَلَى أَمْرِهِ مِنْ أَصْحَابِهِ إِلَّا نَفْرَسِيرٌ لَا يُطْلَعُ عَلَى مَوْضِعِهِ أَحَدٌ مِنْ وَلِيِّ وَلَا غَيْرِهِ إِلَّا الْمَوْلَى الَّذِي يَلِي أَمْرَهُ

90 Al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fi was an agent of al-Ṣādiq who transmitted hadith from both al-Ṣādiq and al-Kāzim. According to some later sources, he briefly preached certain antinomian ideas of which al-Ṣādiq disapproved. On al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fi, see Halm, "Das 'Buch der Schatten' [I]," 224–36 and passim; Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis*, 214–7; Madelung, "Khaṭṭābiyya," 112; Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 215 n. 27; Sachedina, "The Significance of Kashshī's *Rijāl*," 194; Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, index, s.v. "Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fi"; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 240–1; Anthony, "The Mahdī," 465 ff.; Asatryan, "Mofazzal al-Jo'fi," *Elr* (online); Asatryan, *Controversies in Formative Shi'ī Islam*, 43 ff. On works attributed to him, see Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival*, 333–7.

(cont.)

al-Ṭūsī (B) من كتاب الغيبة للطوسي (ب)	al-Ṭūsī (A) من كتاب الغيبة للطوسي (أ)	from al-Nu‘mānī’s <i>al-Ghayba</i> من كتاب الغيبة للنعمانی
<i>Al-Ṭūsī (B)</i> : The master of this <i>amr</i> will have two <i>ghaybas</i> .	<i>Al-Ṭūsī (A)</i> : The master of this <i>amr</i> will have two <i>ghaybas</i> .	<i>Al-Nu‘mānī</i> : The master of this <i>amr</i> will have two <i>ghaybas</i> .
One of them will last longer than the other, until some say that he has died and others say that he was killed.	One of them will last until some say that he has died and others say that he was killed, and still others [say] that he has left [and will not return].	One of them will last until some say that he has died and others say that he was killed, and still others [say] that he has left [and will not return].
No one will remain [faithful] to his <i>amr</i> except a small group of his companions. No one will know his location or have any knowledge about his <i>amr</i> or anything else [related to him] except the <i>mawlā</i> who is in charge of his affairs. ⁹¹	[It will last] until none of his companions remain [faithful] to his <i>amr</i> except a small group. None of his children or anyone else will know his location except the <i>mawlā</i> who is in charge of his affairs. ⁹²	None of his companions will be remain [faithful] to his <i>amr</i> except a small group. None of his friends or anyone else will know his location except the <i>mawlā</i> who is in charge of his affairs. ⁹³

The *matn* of the hadith as recorded by al-Nu‘mānī is older and appears to be more reliable than al-Ṭūsī (A), leading scholars to conclude that the hadith was corrupted (*muḥarraf*), inasmuch as al-Nu‘mānī narrated it without mentioning that the Imam had any children.⁹⁴

As first noted by Madelung, this hadith, like others that specify two *ghaybas* for the Qā’im, is undoubtedly of Wāqifī origin.⁹⁵ ‘Abdallāh b. Jabala (d. 210/834)

91 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 61 (no. 60).

92 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 161–2 (no. 120). Also cited in al-Nīlī, *Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍīra*, 155; al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:118 (no. 279); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:152–3 (no. 5); al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma’wā*, 152; al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 2:304 (no. 238). This particular report has been adduced by some scholars as proof that the Hidden Imam had children during the *ghayba*. For a discussion of this controversial question, see Shaftī, “Dānistanihā-yi,” 329–33.

93 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 176 (no. 5); al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 2:302 (no. 232). This hadith is partially translated in Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya,” 528. Al-Nu‘mānī avers that this one hadith suffices to prove the *ghayba* of the Imam: *wa-law lam yakun yurwā fī l-ghayba illā hādihā l-ḥadīth la-kāna fihi kifāya li-man ta’ammalahu*.

94 Al-Tustarī, *al-Akhhār al-dakhīla*, 150. Gulpāyigānī (b. 1918), *Pāsukh-i dah pursish*, 54, also makes this point and argues that it is not possible to know with certainty whether or not the Hidden Imam has a wife and children.

95 Madelung, “al-Mahdī,” *ET*², 5:1236. Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 57 (no. 52), preserves a hadith explicitly stating that al-Kāzīm will have “two *ghaybas*.”

of Kufa, who is mentioned in the *isnād*, wrote a work to prove the *ghayba* of al-Kāzīm and is widely recognized as a Wāqifi in the early *rijāl* works.⁹⁶ Though al-Ṭūsī cites this hadith, he also responded to the challenge that the hadith is of Wāqifi origin. He writes that this hadith makes clear that the Qā'im will have two *ghaybas*. During the first or minor *ghayba*, information about the Imam was accessible to the faithful. However, during the second *ghayba*, news about him (*akhbārūhu*) was cut off, his written communications (*mukātabātu*), that is, his *tawqī'āt*, ceased, and no one had any information about him except one special person: the *mawlā*. Al-Ṭūsī argues that the same was not true of the *ghayba* of al-Kāzīm and therefore this hadith was not applicable to him.⁹⁷

4 The *mawlā*/*mawālī*

Hadith 2 and Hadith 3 maintain that during the *ghayba* of the Imam, and in particular during the second or longer *ghayba*, no one in his family, or any of his Shī'a, or any of his *awlīyā'* will know his location or be able to contact him. The only person/people who will be able to reach him are the elite of his *mawālī* (according to Hadith 2) or the *mawlā* who is responsible for his affairs (according to Hadith 3); this begs the question: who is/are the *mawlā*/*mawālī*?

Mawlā (pl. *mawālī*), a polysemic word from the root *waw-lām-yā'*, has an expansive semantic field and a penumbra of connotations. It is undoubtedly the most ambiguous term in the above-mentioned hadiths. The word *mawlā* can be rendered as protector, friend, ally, patron, lord or chief; kinsman, dependent or relative; freedman or client (in the sense of being under someone's patronage); or servant.⁹⁸ The term has a range of meanings and a rich history in Shī'i literature. It immediately conjures up the cryptic words Muḥammad is said to have spoken during his farewell pilgrimage at the pool of Ghadīr in the valley of Khumm, words that have been the subject of intense debate

96 Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 216 (no. 563); al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl*, 372; al-Shāhrūdī, *Mustadrakāt 'ilm rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 4:497 (no. 8138).

97 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 61 (no. 60). Cf. al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:117 (no. 277).

98 Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:3061. On its use in the Quran, see Guenther, "Clients and Clientage," *EQ*, 1:344–6; Wensinck, "Mawlā I. In the Qur'an and Tradition," *ET*²; Calderini, "Lord," *EQ*, 3:229–31; Badawi and Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, 1048–9, who identify five denotations: (1) master, protector, patron; (2) ally, friend; (3) kinfolk, dependents; (4) a freed slave; (5) inheritor, heir. See also Crone, "Mawlā II. In Historical and Legal Usage," *ET*²; Campo, "Mawlā," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*; Landolt, "Walāyah," *ER*, 14:9656–9662.

among Sunnī and Shīʿī scholars for centuries: “For whomever I am their *mawlā*, ‘Alī is [also] their *mawlā*.”⁹⁹

4.1 *Mawlā = God*

Some scholars interpreted *al-mawlā* in Hadith 3 as a reference to God. Ḥasan Urūmiyyih-ī (d. after 1260/1844) appears to have been the first to posit this interpretation by rendering *illā l-mawlā alladhī yalī amrahu* as “except Divine Providence Who directs [the Imam’s] affairs”¹⁰⁰ in his Persian translation of the *Kitāb al-ḥujja* of al-Majlisī’s *Biḥār al-anwār*. More than a century later, ‘Alī Davānī (d. 2007) was less oblique in his updated translation of the same volume, completed in 1339 Sh./1960: “except for God Who determines when, where, and how [the Imam] will appear.”¹⁰¹ Researcher and translator Muḥammad Sipihri (b. 1965) advanced the same interpretation: “No one, not even his children, knows [the Imam’s] location, except God, Who holds [the Imam’s] affairs in His hands.”¹⁰²

Defining *mawlā* in these hadiths as God is a late development and though textually tenable, it implies that no human being can know the location of the Imam during the Greater Occultation. This reading thus negates the possibility of any person ever contacting or seeing the Imam, a position with which scholars like Urūmiyyih-ī and Davānī would presumably not agree, given that they have translated many of these accounts into Persian.

4.2 *Mawlā = Friend*

A more likely interpretation of *mawlā* is “intimate friend” (close to one of the meanings of the word *walī*) or “initiate.” In some early sources, the term is deployed in this sense. For instance, a hadith ascribed to al-Kāẓim classifies humanity into three categories: “the true genuine Arab, the *mawlā*, and the uncouth (*ʿilj*) [person]. We [that is, the Imams] are the true, genuine Arabs;

99 Translated and discussed in Valieri, “Ghadir Khumm,” *ET*², 2:993–4; Landolt, “Walāyah,” *ER*, 14:9658; Amir-Moezzi, “Notes à propos de la *Walāya* Imamite,” 738; Dakake, *The Charismatic Community*, 46–7; Dakake, “Ġadīr Ḳomm i.,” *Elr*, 10:246–7; Jafri, *Origins and Early Development*, 21–2; Dien and Walker, “Wilāya,” *ET*², 11:207–9; Bar-Asher, “La rapport de la religion nuṣayrite-ʿalawite,” 81. For other sources, see Lalani, “Ghadir Khumm,” *OB*.

100 [= *magar parvardigārī kih mudabbir-i umūr-i ūst*] Al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i mawʿūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:748.

101 [= *juz khudāvandī kih zuhūr-u ū bi-dast-i vīy ast*] Al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i mawʿūd* (trans. Davānī), 930.

102 [= *magar khudāyī kih ikhityār-i ū rā dar dast dārad*] Al-ʿĀmilī, *Jazīrah-yi khaḍrāʾ* (trans. Sipihri), 218.

the *mawlā* is he who befriends, loves, and is loyal to us (*fa-man wālānā*),¹⁰³ and the uncouth [one] is he who disassociates himself from us and is openly hostile toward us.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, it is said that the tenth Imam appointed his son as the next Imam in the presence of “a group of *mawālī*,”¹⁰⁵ meaning, here at least, a close inner circle of followers and friends. And a hadith ascribed to the third Imam states that the *mawālī* are “from us” (*wa-hum minnā*),¹⁰⁶ which, to cite Amir-Moezzi, “probablement qu’ils sont formés de la même substance que nous.”¹⁰⁷

Among scholars writing in Western languages, the greatest proponent of this interpretation has been Amir-Moezzi. He posits 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 intimes” [the chosen ones among his intimate friends]¹⁰⁸ and “les élus parmi ses Amis fidèles”¹⁰⁹ or “les élus parmi ses fidèles Amis”¹¹⁰ [the chosen ones among his faithful friends]. According to him, *khāṣṣat mawālīhi* refers to “les fidèles particulièrement initiés pour pouvoir être en contact avec l’imâm caché pendant l’Occultation majeure.”¹¹¹

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 [*wālī*] où il se trouve, hormis

103 Cf. In some versions, an additional sentence is added to the hadith of Ghadīr Khumm: “O God, befriend him who befriends [‘Alī] and be an enemy to those who show enmity toward him.” (*Allāhumma wālī man wālāhu wa-‘ādī man ‘ādāhu*). Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 2:226. For slightly different translations, see Landolt, “Walāyah,” *ER*, 14:9658; Lawson, “Seeing Double,” 44; Lawson, “The Quran Commentary,” 91.

104 Al-Ṣadūq, *Ma‘ānī l-akhbār*, 403 (no. 70). For discussion and an alternate translation, see Amir-Moezzi, “Seul l’Homme,” 194, 201–2. Similar hadiths in al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfi* present the trinary without the word *mawlā* or other derivatives of *walāya*, e.g., “There are three categories of people: those who possess knowledge, those who seek knowledge, and the flotsam (*ghuthā*). We [i.e., the Imams] are the possessors of knowledge, our Shī‘a are the seekers of knowledge, and the rest of the people are flotsam.” Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:34 (no. 4).

105 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:325 (no. 2).

106 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 8:244–5 (no. 339).

107 Amir-Moezzi, “Seul l’Homme,” 202.

108 Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 327.

109 Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 133.

110 Amir-Moezzi, “Fin du Temps,” 62.

111 Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin* 328 n. 711 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 234]. This interpretation is repeated with slight variations in Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 133; Amir-Moezzi, “Fin du Temps,” 62; Amir-Moezzi, “Eschatology iii: In Imami Shi‘ism,” *ER*, 8:579.

l'Ami intime qui régit sa Cause [*al-mawlā l-ladhī yalī amrahu*]."¹¹² As he correctly observes, this tradition makes "une distinction inhabituelle" between the *walī*, which he translates in the case of this hadith as "ami"; he translates *mawlā* as "ami intime," to establish a hierarchy among the believers.¹¹³ But it is not clear what is meant or intended by reading *mawlā* as the intimate friend of the Imam who governs or regulates (régit) his cause.¹¹⁴ 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 to guard authority (*yalī amr*), or to be the guardian of his authority (*walī amrihi*), is also to take an affair or matter upon oneself, that is, to undertake something,¹¹⁵ which is the reading that most scholars advance, as below.

Based on this interpretation, Amir-Moezzi suggests that the "les mystiques imâmites n'ont pas cessé de déclarer" 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 and miraculous powers [and come to] know "the location of the hidden imam", [but 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 [that declare anyone who has seen him a lying impostor will] be respected.¹¹⁶

As Amir-Moezzi shows, this reading is developed most fully in the writings of Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (d. 1241/1826) and subsequent Shaykhī masters.¹¹⁷ This reading is encountered in the works of three other Shī'ī writers from the nineteenth century onward: (1) Urūmiyyih-ī renders *khāṣṣat mawālīhi* as "his spe-

112 Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 328 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 137]; also cited in Amir-Moezzi, "Contribution à la Typologie," 133, where "l'Ami intime" is rendered as "l'Ami fidèle"; and in Amir-Moezzi, "Fin du Temps," 62, where "l'Ami intime" is rendered as "fidèle Ami."

113 Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 328 n. 712 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 234].

114 Cf. Amir-Moezzi, "Eschatology iii: In Imami Shi'ism," *Elr*, 8:579, where *al-mawlā alladhī yalī amrahu* is translated as "the faithful friend who guides to his cause."

115 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-Arab*, 15:407. See also Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:3060; Radtke, "Wālī (a., pl. wulāt)," *Elr*², 11:109.

116 Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 137 [= Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 329].

117 On the Shaykhī hermeneutics of the *ghayba*, see Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4:205–300 passim, and in particular, 274–86 and 286–91; Amir-Moezzi, "Une absence remplie de présences."

cial friends” (*khāṣṣān-i dūstanash*);¹¹⁸ (2) Amīnī (b. 1925) likewise interprets *khāṣṣat mawālīhi* as the elite of the Imam’s friends (*khavāṣṣ-i dūstān*);¹¹⁹ and (3) finally, Muḥammad Javād Ghaffārī translates the phrase in al-Nu‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba* as “his servants or his special friends” (*khidmatkārān va yā dūstān-i khāṣṣ-i ū*)¹²⁰ in one place and “the elite friends-servants of (the Imam) who are firm in his *dīn*”¹²¹ in another.

4.3 Mawlā = Servant

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* and *khadama*).¹²² It is common knowledge that the Prophet and all of the Imams possessed male servants, from Anas b. Mālik (d. 93/712) who entered Muḥammad’s service as a youth,¹²³ to Abū l-Sha‘thā’ Qanbar b. Kādān al-Dawsī, ‘Alī’s famous *mawlā* and groom,¹²⁴ to the many servants and attendants of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī.¹²⁵ The will and testament of the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, preserved by al-Kulaynī, states in part that he bequeathed the voluntary alms (*ṣadaqāt*) in his possession, his properties (*amwāl*), and servants (*mawālī*) to his son.¹²⁶

It seems that the prominent Shī‘ī teacher and jurist al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) is referring to the above hadiths when he maintains that, during the second or longer *ghayba*, not even the Imam’s most elite votaries know his location or are able to reach him, inasmuch as “the only people who know his location during the longer (*ghayba*) are those from among his most trustworthy and intimate friends/initiates who were entrusted with the task of serving

118 Al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw‘ūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:751.

119 Amīnī, *Dādghustar-i jahān*, 131.

120 Al-Nu‘mānī, *Matn va tarjumih-yi* (trans. Ghaffārī), 249.

121 [= *dūstān-i khidmatguzār-i khāṣṣ-i ānḥadrat kih bar dīn-i ū hastand*] Al-Nu‘mānī, *Matn va tarjumih-yi* (trans. Ghaffārī), 250.

122 Wensinck, “*Khādim*,” *EI*², 4:899.

123 On him, see Juynboll, “Anas b. Mālik,” *ET*³ (online).

124 He is designated in Imāmī Shī‘ī sources as a *mawlā*, *khādim*, and *ghulam* of ‘Alī from Kufa. Stories of his unwavering loyalty to ‘Alī and ‘Alī’s deep affection for him are plentiful. See, e.g., al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 42:121–140. There is surprisingly little about him in Western sources. See Friedlaender, “The Heterodoxies of the Shiites,” 99–100; Rajkowski, “Early Shī‘ism in Iraq,” 120 n. 2; Anthony, “The Caliph and the Heretic,” 171–2 n. 62. Several of his descendants were hadith transmitters, e.g., Kathīr al-Qanbarī. See Modarressī, *Tradition and Survival*, 309. He also features prominently in an early Nuṣayrī source as “the *bāb* of revelation.” See Bar-Asher and Kofsky, “A Tenth-Century Nuṣayrī Treatise,” esp. 244–9.

125 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:329 (no. 6).

126 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:316 (no. 15).

him (*man tawallā khidmatahu min thuqāt awliyā'ihī*) and who only tend to his [daily] needs (*lam yanqaṭi' 'anhu ilā l-ishtighāl bi-ghayrihi*).¹²⁷ In other words, the *mawālī* are the Imam's attentive servants.¹²⁸

In fact, the overwhelming majority of Shī'ī 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 *khā'-dāl-mīm* root and on a rare occasion, in the case of Persian translators and commentators, the word *ghulām*.¹²⁹ Commenting on the version of Hadith 2 found in *al-Kāfi*, al-Kāshānī speculates that "it seems that by *khāṣṣat al-mawālī* is meant those who serve [the Hidden Imam]."¹³⁰ Al-Kāshānī reached this conclusion "because there is no way for the rest of the Shī'a to reach him during [the Greater Occultation]."¹³¹ According to al-Majlisī, *khāṣṣat al-mawālī* are the Imam's "servants (*khadamahu*), family members and children or the thirty who have already been mentioned [in his commentary on Hadith 1]."¹³² Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī understood *illā l-mawlā alladhī yalī amrahu* to mean "except for the one who is busy serving [the Imam] and tending to his needs."¹³³

Many twentieth-century scholars have advanced a similar interpretation. In his exposition of the doctrines of Shī'ī Islam, Muḥtabā Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī

127 Al-Mufīd, *al-Masā'il al-'ashar fī l-ghayba*, 76.

128 On the function of servants and messengers in the household of the Hidden Imam in the early *ghayba* sources, see Hayes, "The Envoys," 159–60, 163, 188, 239.

129 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." Sourdel, et al. "Ghulām," *EI*², 2:1079–1091. See also Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2286–7. The word has a rich history in Arabic literature, beginning with the Quran, where the following are referred to as *ghulām*: Ismā'īl (Quran 15:53; 37:101); the unnamed youth killed by the companion of Moses (Quran 18:74, 80); the two orphaned owners of the wall that the companion of Moses repaired (Quran 18:82); John the Baptist (Quran 3:40, 19:7–8); Jesus (Quran 19:19–20); the young men who serve the denizens of paradise (Quran 52:24); and Joseph (Quran 12:19), the *ghulām* par excellence in Islamic sources. In Persian, the loanword *ghulām* denotes a young male servant or slave and can carry homoerotic connotations. See Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāmah* (online), s.v. "ghulām."

130 [= *ka-annahu yurīd bi-khāṣṣat al-mawālī alladhīna yakhdīmūnahu*]

131 [= *li-anna sā'ir al-shī'at laysa lahum fihā ilayhi sabīlun*] Al-Kāshānī, *al-Wāfi*, 2:414. The same explanation is repeated by al-Kāshānī in his *al-Shāfi fī l-'aqā'id*, 332.

132 Al-Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-'uqūl*, 4:52. For a Persian translation, see Dhākīrī, "Irtibāṭ bā imām-i zamān," 87; Bahyranī, *Ḥadīth-i ghaybat va sifārat*, 68. The first part of al-Majlisī's explanation is also mentioned in al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-kāfi* (trans. Muṣṭafāvi), 2:140–1 (no. 19).

133 [= *magar ānkīh mashghūl-i khidmat va mutavallī-i umūr-i ūst*] Al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:861.

(d. 1967)¹³⁴ translates *illā l-mawlā alladhī yalī amrahu* as “except the one who serves [the Imam].”¹³⁵ Amīnī understood the phrase as “his special servant” (*khidmatkār-i makhšūšash*),¹³⁶ while Ayatollah Yad Allāh al-Dūzdūzānī (b. 1935) interpreted *mawlā* as “those who support his cause. These are [his] servants and no one else.”¹³⁷

Muḥammad Javād Ghaffārī, the Persian translator of al-Nu‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, rendered the final part of the hadith as “except for the servant who tends to his needs.”¹³⁸ Ghaffārī’s translation is similar to a later translation by ‘Alī-Akbar Dhākiri: “except for the servant who takes care of his affairs.”¹³⁹ Kamarīhī renders *khāṣṣat mawālīhi* as “his initiated servants” (*khādīmīn-i maḥram-i ū*),¹⁴⁰ while Bihbūdī translates the locution as “his special servants” (*ghulāmān-i makhšūš-i ū*).¹⁴¹ Aḥmad Fahrī-Zanjānī translates *mawālī* in connection with these hadiths as servants (*nawkarān*).¹⁴² ‘Alīpūr cites this hadith as proof that meeting the Imam is possible and translates *khāṣṣat mawālīhi* as “the elite servants” (*khidmatkārān-i khāṣṣ*)¹⁴³ who, he argues, are “special individuals” (*afrād-i khāṣṣī*)¹⁴⁴ who have seen and recognized the Imam.

Muḥammad Rāzī, who translated al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba* into Persian, renders the phrase in al-Ṭūsī (1) as “except for the servant who tends to his needs,”¹⁴⁵ and al-Ṭūsī (2) as “except that servant who will oversee his affairs.”¹⁴⁶ ‘Abbās Jalālī, who retranslated al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba* into Persian, followed

134 One of the founders of the *maktab-i tafkīk* and the teacher of such prominent contemporary ulama as ‘Alī Sīstānī (b. 1930) and Abū l-Qāsim Khaz‘alī (d. 2015).

135 [= *magar ānkih ū rā khidmat mīnamāyad*] Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī, *Bayān al-furqān*, 900.

136 Amīnī, *Dādghustar-i jahān*, 132.

137 [= *wa-hum al-khadama wa-lā yashmal ghayr al-khadama*] Al-Dūzdūzānī, *Tahqīq latīf*, 91.

138 [= *magar hamān khidmatguzārī kih bikārhāy-yi ū mīrisad*] Al-Nu‘mānī, *Matn va tarjumih-yi* (trans. Ghaffārī), 251. See also idem, 259, where *al-mawlā* is translated as “special servant” (*khidmatkār-i makhšūš*). A similar translation is offered by Ya‘qūbī, “Nigāhī bih tavallud,” 353: “except the person who is in charge of his affairs” (*juz ān kasī kih umūr-i vay rā pay mīgūrad*).

139 [= *magar khādīmī kih kārhā-yi īshān rā anjām mīdihad*] Dhākiri, “Irtibat bā imām-i zamān,” 88.

140 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-kāfi* (trans. Kamarīhī), 2:576 (no. 19).

141 Al-Kulaynī, *Guzīdih-yi Kāfi* (trans. Bihbūdī), 1:90 (no. 118).

142 Al-Nu‘mānī, *Ghaybat-i Nu‘mānī* (trans. Fahrī-Zanjānī), 220, 213. In other places, Fahrī-Zanjānī translates *mawlā* as “special servant” (*khidmatkār-i makhšūš*).

143 ‘Alīpūr, *Jīlvahhāy-i pinhānī-i imām-i ‘aṣr*, 110.

144 ‘Alīpūr, *Jīlvahhāy-i pinhānī-i imām-i ‘aṣr*, 113.

145 [= *magar ghulāmī kih mutavallī-i amr-i ū mīshavad*] Al-Ṭūsī, *Tuḥfih-yi qudsī* (trans. Rāzī), 51.

146 [= *magar ān ghulamīkih mubāshir-i kār-i ūst*] Al-Ṭūsī, *Tuḥfih-yi qudsī* (trans. Rāzī), 135 (no. 6).

suit, translating the phrase in al-Ṭūsī (1) as “except the servant who has assumed responsibility for his affairs,”¹⁴⁷ and al-Ṭūsī (2) as “except for the servant who is responsible for his affairs.”¹⁴⁸ This reading is affirmed by Javād Mu’allim, who alludes to Hadith 1 and states, “the Imam’s servants are some thirty people who not only see the Imam whenever they wish but are in fact always in his service (*hamīshih dar khidmat-i ḥaḍratand*).”¹⁴⁹

Three scholars writing in Western languages have advanced the same interpretation. Sachedina and Klemm translated *khāṣṣat mawālīhi* as “[the Imam’s] special slaves”¹⁵⁰ and “the chosen ones from among [the Imam’s] assistants” (Auserwählten seiner Helfer),¹⁵¹ respectively, while Hussain translates *mawlā* as “his servant.”¹⁵²

4.4 Mawlā = Client

A fourth possibility is that *mawlā* denotes “client” or “ally.” This meaning should perhaps be the first advanced in discussing any hadith or report that mentions both *mawālī* and the Mahdī or Qā’im. 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.¹⁵³ The promise of the appearance of the Mahdī was especially appealing to the *mawālī*.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, many *mawālī* were attracted to various movements of Shī’ī or proto-Shī’ī Islam, in particular in its more pronounced messianic and eschatological modes of expression.¹⁵⁵ Al-Mukhtār b. Abī ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Thaqafī’s (d. 67/686–7) main supporters, for example, were *mawālī* of Persian

147 [= *juz ghulāmī kih umūr-i marbūṭ bih ū rā bar ‘uhdah miḡirad*] Al-Ṭūsī, *Khūrshīd dar nahān* (trans. Jalālī), 1:231.

148 [= *maqar ghulāmī kih ‘uhdihdār-i kārhā-yi ū mīshavad*] Al-Ṭūsī, *Khūrshīd dar nahān* (trans. Jalālī), 1:107. See also Shafī’ī, “Dānistanihā-yi,” 331.

149 Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i ‘aṣr*, 74 n. 1.

150 Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 84.

151 Klemm, “Die vier *sufarā’*,” 142–3.

152 Hussain, *The Occultation*, 142.

153 One of the best discussions of this topic remains Sharīf’s 1954 work *al-Ṣirā’ bayna al-mawālī wa-l-‘arab*.

154 Daftary, “Alids,” *ET*³ (online). However, as Tucker (*Mahdis and Millenarians*, 126, index, s.v. “Mawla [sic], Mawālī”) demonstrates, Arabs, and not just their non-Arabic client allies, clearly continued to play a role in the various manifestations of Shī’ī messianic fervor.

155 For example, Tucker, “Bayān b. Sam‘ān,” 197, speculates that the *mawālī* made up most, if not all, of Bayān b. Sam‘ān’s (d. 119/737) followers. On him, see Walker, “Bayān b. Sam‘ān,” *ET*³ (online). See also Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism,” 255–6.

origin from Kufa, the cradle of Shī'ī Islam.¹⁵⁶ Al-Mukhtār's failed revolt is significant not only because it is widely recognized as the first historical moment in which the title "Mahdī" was deployed with an explicitly messianic connotation as the promised restorer of true Islam, in this case, applied by al-Mukhtār to 'Alī's son, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya¹⁵⁷ (d. 81/700–1), but also because two central closely related concepts of later Twelver Shī'ī Islam were promulgated: (1) the concept of *sifāra* ("emissaryhood" or representation), in the sense that al-Mukhtār claimed to be the authorized representative and envoy of the concealed Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya, and (2) the concept of *ghayba*, in that a group of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya's followers denied his death and claimed that he was in hiding. The Kaysāniyya, as the sect that grew out al-Mukhtār's movement after his death came to be known, was led by the Persian *mawlā* Kaysān Abū 'Amra and enjoyed the support of many *mawālī* in southern Iraq.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, *mawālī* is used in the sense of clients, or more precisely liberated clients, in hadiths ascribed to the Imams.¹⁵⁹

While the Abbasid revolution is credited with dispelling, in large part, the glaring distinctions between Arab Muslims and the *mawālī*,¹⁶⁰ it is likely that the above hadiths originated in a pre-Abbasid milieu and were later modified by proponents of the Wāqifiyya to fit their doctrines. Identifying these hadiths as Wāqifi in origin, Madelung translates *al-mawlā alladhī yalī amrahu* as "the client in charge of [the Imam's] affairs."¹⁶¹ Hussain's translation of *khāṣṣat mawālīhi* as "his close associates"¹⁶² would appear to be similar in meaning.

156 See Friedlaender, "Jewish-Arabic Studies. I.," 281; Litvak, "Iraq x. Shi'ites of Iraq," *Elr* 13:581; Newman, *The Formative Period*, 6. For Kufa's role as the "cradle of Shī'ism," see Dja'it, "al-Kūfa," *EI*², 5:345–51, esp. "Part II. Politics, ideology and culture in Kūfa."

157 On him, see Buhl, "Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya," *EI*², 7:402–3.

158 Jafri, *Origins and Early Development*, 114, 262–3; Amir-Arjomand, "Millennial Beliefs," 221–2; Madelung, "Kaysāniyya," *EI*², 4:836–8.

159 See, for example, al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, 2:263 (no. 436), where Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq interprets "the mountains" and "the trees" (Quran 16:68) as the Arabs and the *mawālī* who were freed (*al-mawālī 'atāqatan*) respectively. This passage is also referred to in Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 111–2.

160 Daniel, "Abbāsīd Revolution," *EI*³ (online). Cf. the lengthy Daniel apocalyptic text found in Ibn al-Munādī's (d. 336/947) *Kitāb al-Malāḥim*, where an unnamed *mawlā* features prominently as a messianic figure, providing an important window onto some of the apocalyptic attitudes that permeated late third-/ninth- and fourth-/tenth-century Baghdad. For a translation and discussion of this text, see Cook, "An Early Muslim Daniel Apocalypse."

161 Madelung, "al-Mahdī," *EI*², 5:1236.

162 Hussain, *The Occultation*, 142.

The multivalency and indeterminacy of *mawlā* and the resulting ambiguity renders all of the interpretations above tenable, though the evidence is stronger for “client” or “servant,” and most scholars who have commented on these hadiths or translated them prefer the reading of “servant.”

The three hadiths I have discussed in this chapter are the only hadiths adduced by later Shīʿī scholars as traditional proofs to validate their position that elite believers of the Hidden Imam—particularly from the ranks of the ulama—were and are able to see and recognize the Imam during the Greater Occultation. Yet, as I have shown, 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 both convincingly demonstrate, many, if not most, of the hadiths that speak about a *ghayba* or two *ghaybas* for the Qāʾim existed long before the death of the eleventh Imam. Shīʿī scholars, such as al-Kulaynī and al-Nuʿmānī, drew on these hadiths and aligned them with the nascent dogmas about the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam.¹⁶³ This was done, in part, by reinterpreting the earlier reports and partly, perhaps, by producing new reports based on earlier sources.

Again, the overwhelming majority of hadiths mentioned in the earliest sources, many of which were discussed in chapter 1 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. I now turn to a study of this document.¹⁶⁴

163 See Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya,” 532; Madelung, “al-Mahdī,” *ET*², 5:1236. See also Halm, *Shīʿism*, 31–2, 38, 40; Amir Arjomand, “Imam *Absconditus*,” 10; Ansari, *Lʾimamat*, 249.

164 An earlier iteration of portions of this chapter was previously published in the chapter “‘Except the Mawlā’: Notes on Two Hadiths concerning the Ghayba of the Twelfth Imam,” in *Esotérisme Shīʿite: Ses Racines et ses Prolongements*, edited by Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, M. De Cillis, D. De Smet, and O. Mir-Kasimov (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2016), pages 369–85.

“A Lying Impostor”

The death, in Sha‘bān 329/May 941, of the person later cast as the fourth and final emissary of the allegedly concealed twelfth Imam is said to mark the start of the second *ghayba*, commonly referred to in later sources as the Greater or Major Occultation. In this chapter I show that, according to the sources that have survived, in the decades that followed, the possibility of seeing the Imam again was almost completely excluded. This was the position advanced by the Shī‘ī traditionists, as represented in the earliest surviving defenses of the *ghayba* written by al-Nu‘mānī and al-Ṣadūq, and as reflected in the final *tawqī‘* of the Hidden Imam recorded by the latter in his book on the occultation of the Hidden Imam.¹ As I show, the position of rejecting the possibility of seeing the Imam during the Greater Occultation, however, proved untenable. The next generation of scholars revived the rationalist approach that had been in abeyance since the period of the Lesser Occultation.² Al-Mufīd, an exponent of the rationalist Baghdad school, for the most part affirmed the opinion of the traditionists that it was not possible for anyone (including the ulama) to see or have contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, a privilege he reserved only for those among the Imam’s servants who tend to his needs. Al-Mufīd’s student al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and three of the latter’s students disagreed with al-Mufīd by writing that it was at least theoretically possible for the elite followers of the Imam (and not just his servants), which presumably includes the ulama, to see him and benefit from his knowledge. I begin by discussing the views of the traditionists.

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- 1 By traditionists, I mean ulama who privileged the hadiths and reports of the Prophet and the previous Imams over other proofs. Some of these scholars also presented rational ideas and proofs, but their work focused on texts and the compiling of hadiths.
 - 2 On this early stage of Mu‘tazilī influence on the Shī‘ī belief in the Imam’s *ghayba*, see Madelung, “Imamism and Mu‘tazilite Theology”; Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, part II; Amir Arjomand, “Ġayba,” *EIr*, 10:341–4; McDermott, “Ebn Qeba, Abū Ja‘far Moḥammad,” *EIr*, 8:45; Amir-Moezzi, “Islam in Iran vii. The Concept of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi‘ism,” *EIr*, 14:137–8.

1 Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nu‘mānī

Ibn Abī Zaynab al-Nu‘mānī (d. 345/956 or 360/971) was an itinerant student of Shī‘ī hadith, having traveled to Shiraz, Baghdad, Damascus, and Aleppo in search of hadiths of the Imams. He was a student of al-Kulaynī and is commonly referred to by the agnomen *al-kātib* (“the scribe”) for having copied the latter’s *al-Kāfī*.³ Whereas his teacher is believed to have died before the end of the first or shorter *ghayba*, al-Nu‘mānī lived and wrote into the period of the second *ghayba* as well.⁴

Al-Nu‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba* (completed in Dhū l-Ḥijja 342/April–May 954),⁵ from which I cited extensively in chapters 1 and 2, is the earliest extant defense of the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam, from the period of the Greater Occultation. It is difficult to overestimate its importance as a window into the *ḥayra* (confusion, uncertainty, helplessness, loss, and perplexity) that characterized the Shī‘ī community in the period that immediately followed the four emissaries (*sufarā’*), especially in light of the fact that, unlike al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī*, which is a catalogue of Shī‘ī hadiths with few comments from its compiler, al-Nu‘mānī offers valuable observations about the state of the fledgling Imāmī Shī‘ī community of his time and, on rarer occasions, his own interpretation of the hadiths he cites.

In the introduction to *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, al-Nu‘mānī bemoans the fact that the Shī‘a have split into numerous branches (*tasha‘abat madhāhibuhā*). He states that those who believe in the line of the Imams either do not know who the Hidden Imam is, they dispute his existence, or are so pusillanimous as to allow themselves to be overcome with doubt about the *ghayba*.⁶ The heresiographical works that have survived from the Lesser Occultation indicate that after the passing of al-‘Askarī, his followers split into numerous sects. According to al-Nawbakhtī (d. between 300/912–3 and 310/922–3),⁷ fourteen factions emerged (though he only provides information for thirteen of them); according to al-Ash‘arī al-Qummī (d. 299/911–2 or 301/913–4),⁸ fifteen factions. The celebrated

3 Newman, “Between Qumm and the West,” 96. On al-Nu‘mānī, see idem; Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 102–3 n. 259; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 63–4; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 52. On al-Nu‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, see Ansari, *L’imamat*, 36–42; Ourghi, *Schütscher Messianismus*, 30; Amir-Moezzi, “Fin du Temps,” 54 and passim.

4 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 13.

5 Al-Nu‘mānī mentions that the Imam has been in hiding “some eighty years.” See al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 159.

6 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 27–8.

7 *Kitāb Firaq al-Shī‘a*, 79–94 [= al-Nawbakhtī, *Shī‘a Sects* (trans. Kadhim), 153–6].

8 *Kitāb al-Maqāmāt wa-l-firaq*, 102–16.

historian and geographer al-Mas‘ūdī (d. 345/956), writing in 332/943–44,⁹ states that the followers of al-‘Askarī split into twenty-one factions.¹⁰ It is not known how many of these sects still existed at the time of al-Nu‘mānī, who was writing twelve years after the start of the second *ghayba*, but it is clear from his description that many factions continued to vie with one another. A contemporary of al-Nu‘mānī, the Ismā‘īlī *dā‘ī* and Fatimid chief judge Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu‘mān b. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī al-Maghribī, known as al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974), states that eleven sects appeared after the death of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the sixth of which are the Twelver Shī‘a.¹¹ By the time of al-Mufīd, the situation changed quite rapidly, since al-Mufīd is reported to have stated:

Among the *firaq* (“sects”) we have mentioned [of the *firaq* that split after the passing of the al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the eleventh Imam], the only *firqa* (“sect”) that still exists in our time, which is the year 373/983–4, is the Twelver-Imāmī (*al-imāmiyya al-ithnā ‘ashariyya*) whose followers believe in the imamate of [al-‘Askarī’s] son and who are certain that he is alive and will continue to live until the time he rises with the sword.¹²

Later Shī‘ī sources attempted to foresee these divisions. A hadith ascribed to al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī states, “In the year 260 [/873–4], my Shī‘a will become divided (*yaftariq shī‘atī*).”¹³

Taking matters into his own hands, al-Nu‘mānī states that he decided to write a formal defense of the *ghayba* against the attacks of “those who oppose the tiny group [of believers] who steadfastly follow”¹⁴ the Hidden Imam. It is clear from his prologue that at the time in which al-Nu‘mānī was writing, the Shī‘a who upheld the *ghayba* of the son of al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī were a barely visible minority. Al-Nu‘mānī refers to his fellow believers as “the small band” (*al-‘iṣāba al-qalīla*)¹⁵ and a “tiny group who stand apart from the great majority who claim to be Shī‘a”¹⁶ but who have split into different sects (*firaq*) as a result of their corrupt and selfish inclinations.¹⁷ He accuses these factions

9 On him, see Cooperson, “Mas‘udi,” *Elr* (online).

10 See al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma‘ādin al-jawhar*, 4:199.

11 Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, 3:313–5. On this work and its author, see Poonawala, “The Chronology.”

12 Al-Murtaḍā [al-Mufīd], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 321.

13 Al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat al-athar*, 290.

14 [= *man khālaḥa al-shirdhima al-mustaqīma ‘alā*] Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 159.

15 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 34.

16 [= *al-shirdhima al-munfarida ‘an al-khalq al-kathīr al-mudda‘in lil-tashayyu‘*]

17 [= *lā tastawḥishū fī ṭarīq al-hudā li-qillat man yaslukuhu*] Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 174.

of stubbornly refusing to endure patiently the loss (*fiqdān*) of the Imam and the length of his *ghayba* despite repeated warnings from the (previous) Imams that they must remain steadfast. He exhorts them to persevere and “not be distressed at the small number of those who tread the path of guidance.”¹⁸

Al-Nu‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba* is the first Shī‘ī work that delineates the distinguishing features of the two *ghaybas*: “In the first *ghayba*, there were emissaries (*sufarā’*) between the Imam and the people who had been appointed (*manṣūbīn*) [by the Imam].” It is noteworthy that al-Nu‘mānī does not identify these emissaries, nor does he suggest that they were only four in number, as indicated decades later in al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba*. He only says that they were prominent people who were visible and well known to the believers.¹⁹ These emissaries served as intermediaries between the Imam and his believers, and provided answers to all manner of abstruse questions and problems posed by the faithful to their Imam. However, al-Nu‘mānī adds, “This was the short *ghayba* (*al-ghayba al-qaṣīra*) whose days have come to an end and whose time has now passed. The second *ghayba* (*al-ghayba al-thāniya*) is the one during which the emissaries (*sufarā’*) and the intermediaries (*wasā’it*)²⁰ have been removed for a purpose intended by God.”²¹

Interestingly, although al-Nu‘mānī was the first scholar to outline the distinguishing features of the two *ghaybas*—an idea which, as I showed in chapter 2, was borrowed from the post-Mūsā al-Kāẓim Wāqifis—he nonetheless includes hadiths that mention only one *ghayba* for the Qā‘im as well, for example, the following intriguing hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq: “The master of this *amr* will

18 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 175, also cited in idem, 34, 35. For a discussion of this section of al-Nu‘mānī’s work, see Krinis, “Galut and *Ghayba*,” 255–7. An almost identical statement is found in al-Imām ‘Alī (attrib.), *Nahj al-balāgha*, 319 (sermon 201).

19 [= *zāhirīn mawjūdi l-ashkhāṣ wa-l-a‘yān*]

20 This is one of two places in the text where al-Nu‘mānī mentions the *wasā’it* (see below for the other mention). It is not clear if al-Nu‘mānī is using *wasā’it* as a synonym of *sufarā’* or if the term is being deployed to refer to a different class of individuals who served as the Imam’s agents and deputies, similar to how the term *wukalā’* was used by scholars before and after al-Nu‘mānī. On the related term *nawwāb* (“representatives”), which appears to have begun to be used in the Safavid period, see chapter 4.

21 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 179. Hussain, *The Occultation*, 140–1, provides a different translation of a part of this passage. Amīnī offers a partial Persian translation, though he interpolates a phrase that is not found in the original text: “through the intermediation (of the *sufarā’*), the sick were healed.” Amīnī, *Dādgustar-i jahān*, 134–5. Cf. a different Persian translation, Baḥraynī, *Ḥadīth-i ghaybat va sifārat*, 69–70. Sachedina translated the passage from Amīnī’s work as “from [their] hands emanated cures derived from the knowledge and the intricate wisdom which they possessed.” Amīnī, *al-Imām al-Mahdī* (trans. Sachedina), 129. Cf. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 85–6.

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’ [Quran 26:21].”²²

Al-Nu‘mānī declares that this “second *ghayba*,” a time in which the believers are tested (*al-tamhīṣ wa-l-imhtihān*), thrown into confusion (*balbala*), sifted (*gharbala*), and purified (*taṣfiyya*), “is now upon us.”²³ Yet according to al-Nu‘mānī, the hadiths of the Prophet and previous Imams predicted both the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam, referred to, among other things, as the “the master of truth” (*ṣāhib al-ḥaqq*), and the *ghayba* of “the means (*al-sabab*) [of reaching the Imam],” that is, the Hidden Imam’s emissaries, deputies and intermediaries who constituted the support (*al-sinād*) on whom the Shī‘a relied during the first *ghayba*. The moment this support was removed, they became like goats without a shepherd,²⁴ and the upheaval (*fitna*) of the second *ghayba* commenced.²⁵ For as long as they had intermediaries (*wasā’it*) 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” (*raf‘ al-asbāb*) during the second *ghayba* in order to further test the Shī‘a.²⁶ The idea that the purpose of the *ghayba* is to test the faith of the Shī‘a is found in numerous hadiths.²⁷

Al-Nu‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba* represents an initial push to deny any possibility of contacting the Imam until his reappearance (among the Shī‘a, commonly called his *zuhūr*). In distinguishing the second *ghayba* from the first *ghayba*, al-Nu‘mānī is adamant that seeing the Imam is no longer possible; though the Imam physically exists (*inna al-imām mawjūd al-‘ayn wa-l-shakḥṣ*), he cannot be seen during the second *ghayba*. “Until the day of [the appointed] time and the promise [when] the caller will call from the sky (cf. Quran 50:41), he [the Hidden Imam] sees but is not seen.”²⁸

According to al-Nu‘mānī, the “widely attested” (*mutawātir*) hadiths he presents suffice and testify to the truth of the *ghayba* and the concealment of knowledge (*ikhtifā’ al-‘ilm*), and “by knowledge is meant the Proof (of God) to the world [that is, the Hidden Imam].” The previous Imams commanded

22 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 179 (no. 10).

23 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 178–9.

24 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 197 (no. 3), is here alluding to a hadith ascribed to Imam ‘Alī and translated in chapter 1 of this book.

25 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 198.

26 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 198. See also al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 164.

27 See, e.g., al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 155–6 (no. 11), and chapter 2 of this book.

28 [= *ilā yawm al-waqt wa-l-wa‘d wa-nidā’ al-munādī min al-samā’ yarā wa-lā yurā*] Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 138.

the Shī'a to cling steadfastly to their creed, to never shake or waver in their belief, and to yearn patiently for the Imam's *zuhūr*. Al-Nu'mānī then makes a striking statement: while the Shī'a still have an obligation to know and recognize their Imam, they "are excused from not being able to see the Proof (of God) and the Imam of their time during [his] *ghayba*."²⁹ In fact, they are forbidden to search for the Imam,³⁰ 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."³¹ Unlike the people of knowledge (*ahl al-ma'rifa*), who submit to the will 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 location³² or imperiously insist that the Imam show himself to them.³³ Not surprisingly, al-Nu'mānī does not cite or refer to any individuals who have seen or encountered the Imam since the start of the second *ghayba*.

Al-Nu'mānī's words betray an implicit dialogue with rival Shī'i groups, such as the Zaydī Shī'a and especially the Ismā'īlī Shī'a. Zaydī Shī'i writers were engaged in writing anti-Imāmī/Twelve tract. ³⁴ The Ismā'īlī Shī'a posed an even greater threat to the Imāmī/Twelve Shī'i community. The crisis that followed the death of al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī in 260/874 played into the hands of the Ismā'īlī mission or "call to truth" (*da'wat al-ḥaqq*),³⁵ as many of al-'Askarī's for-

29 [= *wa-hum ma'dhūrūn fī an lā yaraw ḥujjatahum wa-imāma zamānthim fī ayyām al-ghayba*]

30 [= *wa-mahzūrūn 'alayhim al-faḥṣ wa-l-kashf 'an ṣāḥib al-ghayba*]

31 [= *wa-mahzūrūn 'alayhim ... al-ishāda bi-dhikrihi faḍlan 'an al-muṭālaba bi-mu'āyinatihī*] Al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 163–4.

32 [= *yuṭālibūna bi-l-irshād ilā shakhṣihī wa-l-dalāla 'alā mawḍi'ihī*]

33 Al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 163–4.

34 One such work is the late third-/ninth-century *Kitāb al-Ishhād*, on which see Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 16, 169 ff.; Lika, *Proofs of Prophecy*, 40. Haider, "Zaydism," 439, notes that Zaydī polemical works against Twelvers featured "repeated references to politically passive Imāms 'sitting quietly at home' in occultation." Hadiths found in al-Nu'mānī's *al-Ghayba* continued to be subject to attacks hundreds of years after al-Nu'mānī's death. Al-Manṣūr bi-Llāh, a Zaydī Imam from the early seventh/thirteenth century, for example, wrote a refutation of the *ghayba* of the final Twelver Imam based on hadiths found in al-Nu'mānī's *al-Ghayba* (though he relied on earlier material also). See Jarrar, "Al-Manṣūr bi-Llāh's Controversy." Zaydī writers also engaged in producing anti-Ismā'īlī tracts. See Lika, *Proofs of Prophecy*.

35 As Halm points out, the followers of the sect known as the Ismā'īlīs used other terms to describe themselves such as *ahl al-ḥaqq* ("the people of truth" or the "people of God"). They called their movement *dīn al-ḥaqq* ("the religion of truth") or simply *al-ḥaqq*, and the preaching of their movement was *da'wat al-ḥaqq* ("the call to truth") or simply *al-*

mer followers transferred their allegiance to the Ismāʿīlī Imam. Among those who changed allegiance was the founder of the Ismāʿīlī community in Yemen, Ibn Ḥawshab, known as Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. 302/914),³⁶ who came from a prominent proto-Imāmī/Twelve family in Baghdad and reproached Shīʿī sects such as the Nuṣayrīs and the Imāmīs/Twelvers for having failed to recognize the true Imam.³⁷ 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 [i.e., the Hidden Imam]) were perpetrating.”³⁸

Reports indicate that on the eve of the founding of the Fatimid dynasty (297–567/909–1171), some of the former followers of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī left Baghdad when the Fatimid Caliph ʿAbdallāh al-Mahdī (d. 322/934) assumed power, and sought to encourage him to conquer the Abbasid capital and the eastern frontiers.³⁹ Others joined the eastern Ismāʿīlī revolutionary movement known as the Qarāmiṭa,⁴⁰ who ridiculed the Imāmī/Twelve Shīʿa for their belief in an absent, concealed Imam.⁴¹ Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Imāmī Shīʿī scholars were actively involved in anti-Ismāʿīlī polemics during this period. Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīshābūrī (d. 260/873), a confidant of the eleventh Imam, wrote a refutation of the Ismāʿīlīs (which has not survived) called *al-Radd ʿalā*

daʿwa. Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*, 17; Halm, *Die Schia*, 194. Likewise, followers of the Ismāʿīlī caliphate that ruled until 567/1171 (commonly called the Fatimid dynasty) referred to the dynasty as *dawlat al-ḥaqq* (“the empire [or cycle] of truth”). Halm, *Die Schia*, 209.

36 On him, see Halm, “Ebn Ḥawshab,” *Elr*, 8:28–9.

37 See Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qurʾān*, 129.

38 Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*, 32. Halm’s statement that “his father was a Twelver Shīʿite” (Halm, “Ebn Ḥawshab,” *Elr*, 8:28) must be modified, since we cannot speak of Twelver Shīʿī Islam before 260/874. See also Walker, “dāʿī(s),” *EI*³ (online); Halm, *The Fatimids*, 17–29, 56–70; Halm, *Shīʿism*, 164: “Ismāʿīlī propaganda (*daʿwa*) was aimed in particular at the Imāmī Shīʿites who had been shaken by the death of their eleventh Imam.”

39 Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*, 182.

40 Daftary, *A History of Shiʿi Islam*, 64. Cf. It is said that al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ (or Rawḥ) al-Nawbakhtī (d. 326/938), later canonized as the third emissary of the Hidden Imam was imprisoned by the Abbasid authorities in Baghdad and urged the Qarāmiṭa to conquer the city. See Anthony, “Nawbakhtī Family,” *Elr* (online).

41 See, for example, the text translated by Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdi*, 254 n. 398, and attributed to a Qarmatī 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 Shīʿites (*rāfiḍa*) who make propaganda for an expected Absent One.” On the Qarāmiṭa, see Madelung, “Qarmatī,” *EI*²; Daftary, “Qarmatians,” *Elr*, 4:823–32; Daftary, “Hidden Imams and Mahdis,” 6–7; Hajnal, “Some Aspects”; and the important study by Madelung, “The Fatimids,” 21–73, in which he corrects the erroneous assumption that the Qarmatī leaders in Bahrain were in collusion with the Fatimids.

l-bāṭiniyya wa-l-Qarāmiṭa.⁴² Al-Kulaynī likewise authored a work entitled *Kitāb al-Radd ‘alā l-Qarāmiṭa* rebutting the Qarāmiṭa.⁴³ Moreover, al-Kulaynī’s *Uṣūl al-kāfi* includes numerous reports that seek to discredit Ismā‘īl b. Ja‘far and remonstrate with the Ismā‘īlīs of his own time. For example, al-Kulaynī includes a report of a believer and his father who wrote letters to the Hidden Imam and received responses (he does not reveal the contents of these letters and responses). A third person then wrote a letter and did not receive a response purportedly because he had become a Qarmaṭī (*anna al-rajul taḥawwala qarmaṭiyyan*) and the Hidden Imam had miraculous knowledge of his conversion.⁴⁴ An example of an implicitly anti-Ismā‘īlī hadith in *al-Kāfi* is one in which Imam al-Bāqir glosses Quran 39:60, “And upon the Day of Resurrection you will 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 ‘Alī and a descendant of Fāṭima?”⁴⁵ al-Bāqir responded, “Yes, even if he is a descendant of both ‘Alī and Fāṭima.”⁴⁶ A contemporary of al-Kulaynī, ‘Alī b. Bābūya al-Qummī (the father of al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, on whom see below), also included reports in his *al-Imāma wa-l-taḥṣira min al-ḥayra* that discredit Ismā‘īl b. Ja‘far.⁴⁷

The threat posed by Ismā‘īlī Shī‘a remained so great that in 342/954, al-Nu‘mānī devoted two complete chapters of his *Kitāb al-Ghayba* to hadiths denouncing the right of Ismā‘īl to the imamate⁴⁸ and to hadiths concerning “those who claim to be an Imam yet are not.”⁴⁹ According to al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058–9), al-Nu‘mānī also authored a celebrated refutation of the Ismā‘ī-

42 Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 198; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī‘a*, 10:189 (no. 459). On Faḍl b. Shādhān, see chapter 2.

43 Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 377; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī‘a*, 10:218 (no. 620); Kohlberg, “Kolayni,” *Elr* (online); Marcinkowski, “A Glance,” 15.

44 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:520 (no. 13); al-Ḥalabī, *Taqrib al-ma‘ārif*, 434; al-Ṭabrisī, *I‘lām al-warā*, 2:263; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:309–10 (no. 28); al-Shirāzī, *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī*, 524–5 (no. 7).

45 [= *wa-in kāna ‘alawīyyan wa-fāṭimīyyan*]

46 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:372; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 2:69; al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 113 (no. 5).

47 Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-taḥṣira min al-ḥayra*², 207 (*bāb ibṭāl imāmat Ismā‘īl b. Ja‘far*), and 201–6. See also chapter 2 on proving the imamate of Mūsā al-Kāzīm.

48 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 342–9 (chapter 24: *fī dhikr Ismā‘īl b. Abī ‘Abdallāh wa-l-dalāla ‘alā akhūhi Mūsā b. Ja‘far [al-Kāzīm]*).

49 [= *man za‘ama annahu imāmun wa-laysa bi-imām*] Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 111–6 (chapter 5).

līs (which has not survived) called *Kitāb al-Radd ‘alā l-Ismā‘īliyya*.⁵⁰ Moreover, both al-Nu‘mānī and several of the scholars who followed him regularly debated with Ismā‘īlī propagandists.⁵¹

2 Al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq

Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī, known as al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (lit., “the veracious teacher”) (b. ca. 311/923; d. 381/991–2) is the other prominent traditionist from the early decades of the second *ghayba* whose defenses of the occultation have survived.⁵² Al-Ṣadūq addresses the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam in a number of works, though he often avoids the question of whether it is possible for believers to see the Imam.

In his *al-I‘tiqādāt fi l-imāmiyya*, the earliest extant work on Shī‘ī creed,⁵³ al-Ṣadūq affirms, “We believe that no one [but the Hidden Imam] can be the Qā‘im”⁵⁴ no matter how long he may remain in a state of *ghayba*.⁵⁵ “Even if he remained in hiding *in perpetuum*, only he could ever be the Qā‘im.”⁵⁶ In

50 Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 383; al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 11 (from the introduction written by Fāris Ḥassūn Karīm); al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī‘a*, 10:183 (no. 409); Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 63; Newman, “Between Qumm and the West,” 96.

51 These scholars include al-Ṣadūq, al-Mufīd, and al-Murtaḍā. See, for example, al-Murtaḍā [al-Mufīd], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 306, 326, where he speaks about the falsity (*buṭlān*) of the Ismā‘īlī Imams; Halm, *Shī‘ism*, 50–1, and other sources mentioned below.

52 On al-Ṣadūq and his works, see Khusravī, *Shaykh Ṣadūq*; al-A‘lamī’s introduction to al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 5–11; Serdani, “Der verborgene Imam”; 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 Shī‘ite Imāmiyyah Thinkers*, 39–77; Ansari, *L’imamat*, 65–76. As mentioned in chapter 1, al-Ṣadūq’s birth is credited to the miraculous intervention of the Hidden Imam. It is said that al-Ṣadūq’s father wrote a letter to Ḥusayn b. Rawḥ al-Nawbakhtī (later canonized as the third emissary of the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation), asking him to intercede on his behalf with the Hidden Imam to pray that he be given a son. See al-Majlisī, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 319.

53 On the development and use of Islamic creedal compositions, see Watt, “Akāida,” *ET*², 1:332–6; Hoover, “Creed,” *ET*³ (online).

54 [= *wa-law baqīya fī ghaybatihī ‘umr al-dunyā lam yakun al-qā‘im ghayrahu*]

55 Here, again, al-Ṣadūq is in implicit dialogue with other Shī‘ī groups (viz., the Fatimids, the Qarāmiṭa, and Zaydīs) who supported rival claimants to being the Mahdī and the Qā‘im, which, by the time of al-Ṣadūq, were seen by the Shī‘a as titles of one and the same person.

56 [= *wa-law baqīya fī ghaybatihī ‘umr al-dunyā lam yakun al-qā‘im ghayrahu*] Al-Ṣadūq, *al-I‘tiqādāt*, 95. For an alternative translation, cf. al-Ṣadūq, *A Shī‘ite Creed*, 86. See also al-Ṣadūq, *al-I‘tiqādāt fi l-imāmiyya*, 94 n. 1; al-Ṣadūq, *A Shī‘ite Creed*, 85. In his critical commentary and correction of al-Ṣadūq’s creed, al-Mufīd does not mention the Hidden Imam and in fact makes no reference to the *ghayba*. See al-Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥ al-i‘tiqād*.

this statement of core Shīʿī beliefs, al-Ṣadūq does not broach the question of whether the Imam can be contacted or encountered during the second *ghayba*. What can be concluded from this silence? Perhaps the question was not controversial and thus did not need to be addressed. That is, the first *ghayba* (i.e., the Lesser Occultation) had ended, and with its termination there was no longer a possibility of physically seeing the Imam.

The fact that al-Ṣadūq did not broach the possibility of seeing the Imam in his statement of core Shīʿī beliefs amounts to an *argumentum e silentio*. In his record of a debate with an unnamed “heretic” (*mulhid*) held at the court of the senior Buyid ruler, Rukn al-Dawla (d. 366/976),⁵⁷ 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 living in his time has physically seen either.⁵⁸

57 Rukn al-Dawla is said to have held al-Ṣadūq in high esteem and, in 350/962, invited him to Rayy for these debates. See Madelung, “Imamism and Muʿtazilite 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 ʿAlī al-Ḥasan b. Būya,” *ET*², 8:597–8; Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty*, index, s.v. “Rukn al-Dawla.”

58 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 93. The record of another series of debates al-Ṣadūq is said to have conducted at the court of Rukn al-Dawla has also been published. Al-Ṣadūq (attrib.), *Munāzarat al-Malik Rukn al-Dawla li-l-Ṣadūq b. Bābūyah*. The editor, Syrian scholar Jawād al-Ward, relied in part on a previously unpublished and undated manuscript available in Iran’s Parliament Library. See idem, 24–5 (from the editor’s introduction). On other extant manuscripts of this work in Iran, see Tafaḍḍulī, *Kitābshināsi-i*, 254–62. A Persian translation of parts of these alleged debates was provided by al-Qāḍī Nūr Allāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610–11), *Majālis al-muʾminīn*, 1:461–3. Ḥasan Anṣārī, *Barrasihā-yi tārikhī*, 757–60, has raised questions about the authenticity and provenance of this record and established that the manuscript could not have been written during al-Ṣadūq’s lifetime. It is nonetheless useful to review briefly the portion of the record of these debates that concern the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam, since it reflects an attempt by an unknown person to defend the *ghayba*, and to read this explanation back into the time of al-Ṣadūq. In the record, Rukn al-Dawla is attributed as having posed three questions about the Hidden Imam. First, he asked when the Imam will appear. Al-Ṣadūq is said to have responded that God has concealed the Imam from the people for reasons of wisdom and according to a purpose known to Him alone. Al-Ṣadūq then cites the prophetic hadith “The Qāʾim [who will appear] from my descendants is like the Hour [of the Day of Judgment].” (This hadith is also recorded in al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 347; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 51:154; Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Shiʿite Islam*, 212–3. Cf. Abū Maʿāsh, *al-Imām al-mahdī fi l-qurʾān wa-l-sunna*, 144–6; Mubārak, *Bashāʾir al-imām al-muntaẓar*, 17, 127–8.) Rukn al-Dawla’s second question dealt with how the Imam could live so long. Al-Ṣadūq defends the Imam’s longevity by citing the Quranic story of Noah, who is said to have lived 950 years. But when Rukn al-Dawla objected that no one lives as long as Noah anymore, al-Ṣadūq responds by quoting a hadith ascribed to Muḥammad, prophesying that everything that occurred in the past will be repeated in his community. He then argues that since no one is better known than the

Al-Ṣadūq addresses the question of contacting the Hidden Imam more directly in his magnum opus on the *ghayba* titled *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-ni‘ma fī ithbāt al-ghayba wa-kashf al-ḥayra*, a work that has been described as “the comprehensive work on the subject of the twelfth Imam and his *ghayba*.”⁵⁹ Similar to al-Nu‘mānī’s motivation for writing his *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, al-Ṣadūq decided to write *Kamāl al-dīn* after he grew perturbed by the “widespread conversions” of Imāmī/Twelve Shi‘a away from their faith and by the doubts and questions that pervaded the Shi‘i community about the *ghayba*, especially in Khurasan during his time there.⁶⁰ In addition to the hadiths cited in *Kamāl al-dīn* negating the possibility of seeing the Imam (on these hadiths, see chapter 1), al-Ṣadūq also maintains that the Shi‘a can no longer reach the Imam, or know where he is hiding, because people, 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 fall into the wrong hands. Moreover, if the Imam could be seen, some Shi‘a might, while debating with their opponents, reveal his identity or location.⁶¹ It is also worth noting that al-Ṣadūq cites in *Kamāl al-dīn* a list of the individuals who saw the Imam during the early years of the first *ghayba*—both deputies (*wukalā’*) of the Imam in various regions as well as non-deputies,⁶² but no such list is presented for anyone who has seen him after the first *ghayba*. In sum, the Imam, in the estimation of al-Ṣadūq, can no longer be seen in a wakeful state. The believers are instead instructed, in a letter attributed to the Hidden Imam from the Lesser

Mahdī, it is only natural to expect that the prophetic precedent of longevity (*sunnat ṭūl al-‘umr*) would be fulfilled by the Hidden Imam. Finally, Rukn al-Dawla inquired about what need an absent Imam served—a question which, I will show, was of paramount importance for the rationalist scholars who followed al-Ṣadūq. Al-Ṣadūq responds with alacrity by adducing the traditional proof, found in Shi‘i hadiths, that the world will cease to exist without the presence of an Imam. Citing Quran 8:33, “But God would never chastise them, with you [O Muḥammad] among them,” he maintains 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.” Al-Ṣadūq (attrib.), *Munāzarat*, 67–71.

59 Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 79. Al-Ṣadūq’s work has also been called *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, *al-Kamāl fī l-ghayba*, *Kamāl al-ni‘ma fī l-ghayba*, and *Ikmal al-dīn wa-itmām al-ni‘ma*. See Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 210 (no. 251).

60 Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 97–8. Serdani, “Der verborgene Imam,” 59, sets 368/978–9 as the *terminus post quem* of the work’s composition. See also Ourghi, *Schittischer Messianismus*, 30–1; Amīnī, “Kitāb-i ghaybat-i Shaykh Ṭūsī,” 480.

61 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 54–5; referred to in Kohlberg, “Taḥiqqa in Shi‘i Theology and Religion,” 350.

62 The lists are presented in tables in Hayes, “The Envoys,” 134–6, 137–9.

Occultation, to direct their questions about anything that transpires to those who transmit the hadith of the Imams (i.e., the ulama), for they (the transmitters of hadith) constitute the proof of the Hidden Imam to the believers just as the Hidden Imam constitutes the proof of God to them.⁶³

3 The Final Missive of the Hidden Imam

In *Kamāl al-dīn*, al-Ṣadūq is the first scholar to record the *locus classicus* for proscribing the possibility of seeing the Imam in the second *ghayba*: the final missive or written communication (*tawqīʿ*) of the Hidden Imam.⁶⁴ The final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam, a document “d’ une importance capitale dans la destine historique et doctrinale de l’imāmisme,”⁶⁵ was furnished by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī (d. ca. 329/941),⁶⁶ who was canonized in later sources as the

63 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 484.

64 The word *tawqīʿ* had three general meanings in the premodern period: (1) the record of a verdict in a tort redress, (2) a written edit, and (3) a signature at the end of a letter. See Babinger and Bosworth, “*Tawqīʿ*,” *EI*², 6:933–5, who do not mention the *tawqīʿāt* of the Shīʿī Imams. On the literary qualities of the first two usages, see Gruendler, “*Tawqīʿ* (Apostille),” 101–29. It appears that the term was used for the letters attributed to the Hidden Imam in order to indicate that they were signed documents or carried the Imam’s seal. On the *tawqīʿāt* of the Imams, and in particular, those attributed to the Hidden Imam, see Shabīrī, “*Tawqīʿ* (3),” *DJI* (online edition); Ḥāʾirī, “*Tawqīʿāt*,” *DMT*, 5:150–3. There are approximately seventy documents identified as *tawqīʿāt* from the Hidden Imam. See Riḍwānī, *Mawʿūdshīnāsī*, 271. With the exception of the letters addressed to Shaykh Mufīd (on these two letters, see chapter 4), all of the *tawqīʿāt* allegedly written by the Hidden Imam are from the Lesser Occultation. The *tawqīʿāt* are compiled in Akbar-Nijād, *Mawsūʿat tawqīʿāt*, and in al-Shīrāzī, *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī*. A comprehensive study of the *tawqīʿāt* remains a desideratum. Many of them deal with questions of finance or respond to instances of apostasy (viz., charging certain believers, such as al-Shalmaghānī, with heresy and apostasy). See Hussain, *The Occultation*, 126–32; Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 42–3; Amir Arjomand, “Imam *Absconditus*,” 2; Hayes, “The Envoys.”

65 Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 276 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 114].

66 His name is often misspelled in Western sources as “al-Samarri” based on the assumption that he was from the city of Samarra, 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-Sāmarrāʿī.” Halm, *Die Schia*, 43 n. 16 (perhaps relying on al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 3:246) suggests a vocalization of “al-Simmarī” after Simmar, located in southern Iraq near Kashkar between Wasit and Basra. Hussain, *The Occultation*, 133, offers the same explanation, though he renders the *nisba* “al-Sammari.” Cf. Tūnihī, *Mawʿūdshīnāsī*, 409, who calls the village “Samar.” The correct vocalization, however, appears to be “al-Samurī,” a *nisba* that reverts to an ancestor whose name was al-Samur (meaning an acacia tree, Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:1425). This vocalization is given in al-Tabrīzī (d. 1093/1682), *al-Hidāyā*,

fourth and final of the four emissaries (*sufarā'*), six days before his death.⁶⁷ Some eighty years after al-Ṣadūq, the final *tawqī'* was cited in the *Kitāb al-Ghayba* of al-Ṭūsī, who states that he heard it from a group of Shī'a on the authority of al-Ṣadūq. For ease of comparison, the texts are presented side-by-side in the following table. The text of the *tawqī'* is almost identical in both works, with some minor variants and one major difference, which has been identified in boldface:

The final *tawqī'* of the Hidden Imam in al-Ṭūsī's *Kitāb al-ghayba*

The final *tawqī'* of the Hidden Imam in al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-ni'ma*

(١) وَأَخْبَرَنَا جَمَاعَةٌ عَنْ أَبِي جَعْفَرٍ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ عَلِيِّ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ بْنِ بَابُوَيْهِ قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي أَبُو مُحَمَّدٍ الْحَسَنُ بْنُ أَحْمَدَ الْمَكْتَبِيُّ قَالَ

(١) حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو مُحَمَّدٍ الْحَسَنُ بْنُ أَحْمَدَ الْمَكْتَبِيُّ قَالَ

(٢) كُنْتُ بِمَدِينَةِ السَّلَامِ فِي السَّنَةِ الَّتِي تُوُفِّيَ فِيهَا الشَّيْخُ أَبُو الْحَسَنِ عَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ السَّمُرِيُّ (قَدَسَ اللَّهُ رُوحَهُ) حَضَرْتَهُ قَبْلَ وَفَاتِهِ بِأَيَّامٍ فَأَخْرَجَ إِلَى النَّاسِ تَوْفِيعًا نَسَخْتَهُ

(٢) كُنْتُ بِمَدِينَةِ السَّلَامِ فِي السَّنَةِ الَّتِي تُوُفِّيَ فِيهَا الشَّيْخُ عَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ السَّمُرِيُّ (قَدَسَ اللَّهُ رُوحَهُ) حَضَرْتَهُ قَبْلَ وَفَاتِهِ بِأَيَّامٍ فَأَخْرَجَ إِلَى النَّاسِ تَوْفِيعًا نَسَخْتَهُ

(٣) بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ يَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ السَّمُرِيُّ أَعْظَمَ اللَّهُ أَجْرَ إِخْوَانِكَ فَيْكَ فَإِنَّكَ مَيِّتٌ مَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ فَاجْمَعْ أَمْرَكَ وَلَا تَوَصَّ إِلَى أَحَدٍ فَيَقُومَ مَقَامَكَ بَعْدَ وَفَاتِكَ فَقَدْ وَقَعَتِ الْعَيْبَةُ الثَّانِيَةَ فَلَا تُظْهِرُ إِلَّا بَعْدَ إِذْنِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى ذَكَرَهُ وَذَلِكَ بَعْدَ طَوْلِ الْأَمَدِ وَقَسْوَةِ الْقُلُوبِ وَامْتِلَاءِ الْأَرْضِ جَوْرًا

(٣) بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ يَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ السَّمُرِيُّ أَعْظَمَ اللَّهُ أَجْرَ إِخْوَانِكَ فَيْكَ فَإِنَّكَ مَيِّتٌ مَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ فَاجْمَعْ أَمْرَكَ وَلَا تَوَصَّ إِلَى أَحَدٍ يَقُومُ مَقَامَكَ بَعْدَ وَفَاتِكَ فَقَدْ وَقَعَتِ الْعَيْبَةُ الثَّانِيَةَ فَلَا تُظْهِرُ إِلَّا بَعْدَ إِذْنِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَذَلِكَ بَعْدَ طَوْلِ الْأَمَدِ وَقَسْوَةِ الْقُلُوبِ وَامْتِلَاءِ الْأَرْضِ جَوْرًا

1:96; Farīdānī, “Samurī,” *DMT*, 9:292; and ‘Alī, *al-Mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 239 [= Arabic translation of Ali, *Der Mahdī der Zwölfer-Schī'a und seine vier Safire*]. Al-Ṣadr, *Tārīkh al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*, 412, states that some have written his name as “al-Saymarī” or “al-Ṣaymarī,” but he does not give a source and I have not encountered these vocalizations elsewhere. On the four emissaries in general, see Klemm, “Die vier *sufarā'*.” On the first two emissaries in specific, see Ali, “Die beiden ersten.”

67 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 394 (no. 364), is the first work in which we find a report stating that al-Samurī died on 15 Sha'bān 329/20 May 941. However, both al-Ṭabarsī and Ibn Ṭāwīs state that al-Samurī died in 328/939–40 and add that the Lesser Occultation lasted seventy-four years. Al-Majlisī, *Mir'āt al-uqūl*, 4:52–3, reasons that al-Ṭabarsī and Ibn Ṭāwīs are calculating the Lesser Occultation from the year the Hidden Imam was born, rather than from the year al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī died. This view is repeated in al-Ṣadr, *Tārīkh al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*, 417.

(cont.)

The final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam in al-Ṭūsī's
Kitāb al-ghayba

The final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam in al-Ṣadūq's
Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿma

(٤) وَسَيَاتِي شِيعَتِي مِنْ يَدْعِي الْمَشَاهِدَةَ إِلَّا فَنِّنِ ادَّعَى
الْمَشَاهِدَةَ قَبْلَ خُرُوجِ السَّفِيَانِيِّ وَالصَّيْحَةِ فَهُوَ كَذَّابٌ مُفْتَرٍ
وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ

(٤) وَسَيَاتِي شِيعَتِي مِنْ يَدْعِي الْمَشَاهِدَةَ إِلَّا فَنِّنِ ادَّعَى
الْمَشَاهِدَةَ قَبْلَ خُرُوجِ السَّفِيَانِيِّ وَالصَّيْحَةِ فَهُوَ كَذَّابٌ مُفْتَرٍ
وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ

(٥) قَالَ فَتَسَخَّنَا هَذَا التَّوْقِيعَ وَخَرَجْنَا مِنْ عِنْدِهِ فَلَمَّا كَانَ
الْيَوْمَ السَّادِسَ عَدْنَا إِلَيْهِ وَهُوَ يَجُودُ بِنَفْسِهِ فَقِيلَ لَهُ مِنْ وَصِيكَ
مَنْ بَعْدَكَ فَقَالَ لِلَّهِ أَمْرٌ هُوَ بِالْغَيْهِ وَقَضَى فِهَذَا آخِرَ كَلَامٍ سَمِعَ
مِنْهُ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ وَأَرْضَاهُ⁶⁸

(٥) قَالَ فَتَسَخَّنَا هَذَا التَّوْقِيعَ وَخَرَجْنَا مِنْ عِنْدِهِ فَلَمَّا كَانَ
الْيَوْمَ السَّادِسَ عَدْنَا إِلَيْهِ وَهُوَ يَجُودُ بِنَفْسِهِ فَقِيلَ لَهُ مِنْ وَصِيكَ
مَنْ بَعْدَكَ فَقَالَ لِلَّهِ أَمْرٌ هُوَ بِالْغَيْهِ وَمَضَى رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ فِهَذَا
آخِرَ كَلَامٍ سَمِعَ مِنْهُ⁶⁹

The following translation is based on the version al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿma*:

- (1) Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Mukattib⁷⁰ told us:
- (2) I was in Baghdad the year ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī died. I visited him a few days before he died. He showed the people a *tawqīʿ* [from the Hidden Imam], which I copied:
- (3) In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.
To ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī, may God increase the reward of your brethren through you! You will die in six days, so prepare yourself and appoint no one to succeed you, for the second *ghayba* [al-Ṭūsī: the com-

68 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 395; al-Ṭabrisī, *Tāj al-mawālīd*, 112–3; al-Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām al-warā*, 2:260; al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʿij wa-l-jarāʿih*, 3:1128–9 (no. 46); al-Ṭabarsī, *al-Ihtijāj*, 2:478; al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh al-aʿimma wa-wafayātihim*, 266; al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:1023–4; al-Nīlī, *Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍīʿa*, 338–9; al-Kāshānī, *Nawādir al-akhbār*, 233; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:360–1 (no. 7), 52:151 (no. 1); al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:321 (no. 112); al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 2:308; al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 1:378; al-Shīrāzī, *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī*, 203; al-Badrī, *ʿAwālim al-bayān*, 114. For Persian translations, see Ardabili (attrib.), *Ḥadiqat al-shīʿa*, 2:989–9; Khātūnābādī, *Kashf al-ḥaqq*, 58; al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 191, 229–30; Nūrī-Ṭabarsī² (d. 1318/1900–1), *Kifāyat al-muwahhidīn*, 2:788; al-Ṭūsī, *Khūrshīd dar nahān* (trans. Jalālī), 2:554–5; Amīnī, *Dādgustar-i jahān*, 143.

69 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 467 (no. 44); al-ʿAṭṭār, “Muqaddimat al-muḥaqqiq,” 22. For Persian translations, see al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn* (trans. Pahlavān), 2:294–5.

70 Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Mukattib was a teacher of al-Ṣadūq. Al-Khūʿī, *Muʿjam riḡāl al-ḥadīth*, 5:272; Dhākīrī, “Irtibāṭ bā imām-i zamān,” 57.

plete *ghayba*] has come, and the *zuhūr* will not take place before God—exalted and glorified be He—permits it, and that will only happen after a long time has passed, when hearts have become callous and oppression has filled the earth.⁷¹

- (4) [Before I reappear], some [or someone] will come to my followers claiming to have seen [me] with their own eyes.⁷² But beware! Anyone who claims to have seen [me] before the appearance of al-Sufyānī⁷³ and [the sounding of] the Cry⁷⁴ is a lying impostor.⁷⁵ There is no power nor strength except in God, the Exalted, the Great.⁷⁶

71 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), and he will fill the earth with equity and justice, even as it has been filled with injustice and tyranny. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 1:338 (no. 7).

72 It is also possible to read this sentence as “[Before I reappear], my followers will come, those claiming to have seen (me) with their own eyes.” Cf. al-Shubbar (d. 1242/1826–7), *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 287, who reproduces the *tawqīʿ* from a manuscript of al-Ṭabarsī’s (on whom, see chapter 4) *al-Ihtijāj* and has written this sentence as “[Before I reappear], some [or someone] will come claiming to have seen (me)” (*wa-sayaʿti man yaddaʿil-mushāhada*), i.e., without the word “my followers” (*shīʿatī*).

73 In early Shīʿī sources, likely originating in an anti-Umawī Kufan 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, “*Ḥadīth*, Authority and the End of the World,” 34; Madelung, “The Sufyānī,” 5–48; Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 165, 211 n. 66; Poonawala, “Apocalyptic ii. In Muslim Iran,” *Elr*, 2:157–60; Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism,” 254–6, 262; Shaddel, “The Sufyānī.” For Shīʿī hadiths that mention the emergence of al-Sufyānī as one of the signs that will precede the appearance of the Qāʾim, see al-Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba*, 310–8 (chapter 18: *mā jāʾa fi 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. ca. 32/653), the arch-enemy of the Prophet Muḥammad.

74 The Cry (*al-ṣayḥa*) is mentioned six times in the Quran as the harbinger of the end of the world and the arrival of the Day of Judgment, most prominently Quran 50:42: “On the day they hear the Cry in truth, that is the day of coming forth.” The sounding of the cosmic Cry from the heavens is glossed as one of the portents of the appearance of the Qāʾim in Shīʿī sources. See Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 287 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 118]; Ghaemmaghami, “{And the Earth will Shine with the Light of its Lord} (Q 39:69),” 612, 620. On the Cry, see also Cook, “The Apocalyptic Year,” 64; Lawson, “Duality, Opposition and Typology,” 37–8. Cf. ʿAlī’s declaration in the *Khuṭbat al-bayʾān* that he is the Cry. Al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, 319 (cf. Dihdār-Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ khuṭbat al-bayʾān*, 76).

75 The original language text of the final *tawqīʿ* in al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn* has here the *nomen agentis al-kādhīb* (liar or one who lies, deludes and misleads, since the *nomen agentis* in Arabic is, properly speaking, a verbal adjective); the version of the *tawqīʿ* in al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba* has the more intensive verbal adjective *al-kadhḥāb* (a habitual liar) from the *faʿāl* form, the *ism al-mubālāgha* (the noun of intensiveness). The phrase is clearly meant

- (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.⁷⁷ Someone said to him, “[Tell us,] who is to succeed you?” He responded, “God has a purpose (*amr*) which He will surely accomplish” [cf. Quran 65:3]. He passed away, may God be pleased with him, and these were the last words anyone heard from him.⁷⁸

The final *tawqīʿ* of the Imam has been transmitted by numerous Shīʿī ulama through the centuries, most of whom cite the version produced by al-Ṭūsī.⁷⁹ A few scholars discuss the *tawqīʿ* but choose to ignore or leave out the “lying impostor” passage.⁸⁰ In some Persian translations of the *tawqīʿ*, translated by

to recall the Quranic verse “He is naught but a man who has forged against God a lie” (*in huwa illā rajul iftarā ʿala Allāh kadhīban*) (Quran 23:38). The locution *iftarā* (or some other form of this verb) *ʿala Allāh kadhīban/al-kadhīb* is encountered twenty-one times in the Quran, e.g., 4:50, 6:21, 10:69, 21:61, 34:8. The word may have been changed from *al-kādhīb* to *al-kadhīb* as a further slight against Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī, the brother of the al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, who is referred to as Jaʿfar al-Kadhīb in Shīʿī sources because he claimed that al-ʿAskarī did not have a surviving son and (in some narrations) proclaimed himself the next Imam. In later Shīʿī sources, e.g., al-Majlisī, *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-Kadhīb. This report is one of many circulated to vilify Jaʿfar b. ʿAlī. In early sources, Musaylima (d. ca. 12/633–4), an Arab who claimed after meeting Muḥammad to be a prophet, is also commonly labeled *al-kadhīb*. See Savant, *The New Muslims*, 174.

- 76 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 exalted, the 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 it is commonly used in classical and modern Arabic after hearing disastrous news or something blasphemous or reprehensible. See Piamenta, *Islam in Everyday Arabic Speech*, 155–8. Its use at the end of the final *tawqīʿ* serves to emphasize the warning and declaration expressed in the previous two sentences.
- 77 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.
- 78 For slightly alternate translations, see Amini, *al-Imām al-Mahdī* (trans. Sachedina), 138; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 276 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 13]; Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 122–3; Klemm, “Die vier *sufarāʾ*,” 135; Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam*, 164; Momen, *Shiʿi Islam*, 52; Hussain, *The Occultation*, 134–5, has the singular “someone shall come to my partisans claiming”; Eliash, “Misconceptions,” 23–4; Corbin, “Au Pays de l'Imām cache,” 45; Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4:324; Kohlberg, “Authoritative Scriptures,” 308; Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 43; Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis of the Imamate,” 508–9.
- 79 See the notes following the Arabic text of the *tawqīʿ* for some of these references.
- 80 For example, the East African Khoja Shīʿī scholar Mullah Haji Mohammadjaffer Sheriff Dewji (d. 1960) mentions the final *tawqīʿ* in his defense of the Hidden Imam but inex-

scholars who support the possibility of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, the text has been interpolated by the addition of the word “near” (*zūd* / *bih zūdi*) or the words “in the near future” (*dar āyandih-yi nazdik*). It appears that by adding “near” or “in the near future,” these scholars are suggesting that, although those who claimed to have seen the Hidden Imam in the years immediately following the end of the Lesser Occultation were liars, later (and contemporary) claimants to encountering the Imam are veridical.⁸¹

A more deliberate misrepresentation of the *tawqī* can be observed in a self-purported “analytical history” of the *ghayba* by Pūr-Sayyid-Āqāyī, Jabbārī, Āshūrī, and Ḥakīm.⁸² In their discussion of the final *tawqī*, they point out five facts: (1) it was written for al-Samurī; (2) he was ordered not to appoint a successor to replace him, which “is proof that direct communication between the Mahdī and his special/exclusive representatives (*nuvvāb-i khāṣṣ*) had ended and from this date forward, the people could no longer pose questions to the Imam through them”; (3) the Lesser Occultation had come to an end and the Greater Occultation had begun; (4) the Imam will appear at a time of God’s choosing; (5) two signs will herald the Imam’s *parousia*: the appearance of al-Sufyānī and the sounding of the Cry.⁸³ The sentence in the *tawqī* about “a lying impostor” is omitted. Consequently, their work, ostensibly a history of the *ghayba*, does not contain any accounts of encounters with the Imam from the Greater Occultation. In fact, the authors do not broach the topic, giving the impression that no one has claimed to have encountered the Imam since the period of the Lesser Occultation.

Still others have interpreted the “lying impostor” passage of the final *tawqī* as applying only those who *both* claim to see the Imam *and* claim to be his exclusive representative (like the four emissaries (*sufarā*) from the Lesser Occultation). In other words, during the Greater Occultation, only those who claim to have

plicably leaves out the “lying impostor” passage. Dewji, *Imame Zaman Hazrat Mehdi*, 46. Since his book features stories of “numerous persons [who] have reported meeting Hazrat Mehdi (A.S.)” (idem, 129) during the Greater Occultation, Dewji likely felt that this sentence of the *tawqī* conflicted with the accounts and did not wish to reconcile them.

81 See al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 191; al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqīb*, 2:851; ‘Alīpūr, *Jibvahnāy-i pinhānī-i imām-i ‘aṣr*, 120. Abdulaziz Sachedina translates the beginning of the “lying impostor” passage in similar manner: “In the *near* future there will be those among my followers.” Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 96. The word “near” is not mentioned in the text. Cf. other Persian translations which remain loyal to the text of the *tawqī*: al-Majlisī, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 315; al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-imaw‘ūd* (trans. Davānī), 928; al-Kamarīhī, *Davāzdahumīn, sīn-zā’-sīn-ḥā*; Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī, *Bayān al-furqān*, 902; Farīdanī, “Samurī,” *DMT*, 9:292.

82 Their work is entitled *Tārīkh-i ‘aṣr-i ghaybat*.

83 Pūr-Sayyid-Āqāyī, Jabbārī, Āshūrī, and Ḥakīm, *Tārīkh-i ‘aṣr-i ghaybat*, 300–1.

seen the Imam and likewise claim to be his emissary are to be shunned as liars. Otherwise, if one does not claim to be the Imam's emissary, this sentence of the *tawqīʿ* does not apply.⁸⁴ As I will show in chapter 4, this eisegesis of the *tawqīʿ* is anachronistic, as the concept of "representation" (*niyāba*) and the distinction between "the special representatives" (*al-nuwwāb al-khāṣṣa*) and "the general representatives" (*al-nuwwāb al-ʿamma*) of the Imam was not fully developed until the Safavid period.

Before continuing my discussion of the critical sentences of the final *tawqīʿ*, beginning with the words "[Before I reappear], some [or someone] will come to my followers claiming to have seen [me]," it is necessary to register a few comments about the final emissary (*saḡīr*) and the change from "second *ghayba*" (in the text of the *tawqīʿ* in al-Ṣadūq) to "complete *ghayba*" (in the text of the *tawqīʿ* in al-Ṭūsī).

3.1 *The Final Emissary of the Hidden Imam*

ʿAlī b. Muḡammad al-Samurī is a mysterious figure. Virtually nothing is known about him, though he is the last person who was said to have been in regular contact with the Hidden Imam during the period that came to be known as the Lesser Occultation. The only information presented about him in the fifth-/eleventh-century *rijāl* works is that he was originally one of the companions of the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, and that he succeeded the powerful al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḡ (or Rawḡ) al-Nawbakhtī (d. 326/938)⁸⁵ as the fourth authorized emissary (*saḡīr*) of the Hidden Imam.⁸⁶ However, in the earliest sources, there is no textual evidence for either of these points. Unlike other emissaries and agents 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-tabṣīra min al-ḡayra*). Nor is he mentioned in al-Nuʿmānī's *Kitāb al-Ghayba*. Moreover, unlike the previous emissaries (*sufarāʿ*), there are no letters from the Imam announcing that al-Samurī was the suc-

84 See appendix II.

85 Al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḡ (or Rawḡ) al-Nawbakhtī occupied a powerful position in the Abbasid financial administration and frequently dissimulated his Shīʿī identity. He was later imprisoned for failing to pay overdue taxes and secretly urging the Qarāmiṭa to invade Baghdad. On him, see Arjomand, "Ḥosayn b. Ruḡ," *Elr*, 12:506–8; Anthony, "Nawbakhti Family," *Elr* (online); Abdulsater, "Dynamics of Absence," 314–26; Hayes, "The Envoys," 488–507. Cf. for traditional, descriptive biographical notes, see Hūshangī, "Ḥusayn b. Rūḡ Nawbakhtī," *DJI* (online); Yūsufī-Ishkavarī, "Ḥusayn b. Rūḡ," *DMT*, 6:330–1.

86 Al-Shīrāzī, *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī*, 104; al-Ṣadr, *Tārīkh al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*, 412–3; Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 96, says that he "belonged to the close associates of al-ʿAskarī." Cf. Abdulsater, "Dynamics of Absence," 327 n. 136.

cessor to the third emissary, al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ (or Rawḥ) al-Nawbakhtī. In fact, there appear to have been serious doubts about al-Samurī’s claim to be the Imam’s emissary. Al-Ṭūsī recounts several theurgic acts (*karāmāt*) attributed to him as evidence of his being an emissary, including his foreknowledge of the precise moment when Ibn Bābūya died.⁸⁷ Reports of these alleged miracles may have served to vindicate al-Samurī’s authority to those who questioned it.

As a historical figure, al-Samurī’s significance lies in the notion that the institution of *sifāra* (“emissaryhood”) is said to have ended with him, only three years after he is said to have assumed the reins. (Al-Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ (or Rawḥ) al-Nawbakhtī, by contrast, is said to have served as an emissary for some twenty-one years.) It is not clear why the institution of *sifāra* was abandoned in favor of the idea of a second *ghayba*, during which there would no longer be any *sufarā’*. Some Shī’ī scholars contend that the Lesser Occultation prepared the way for the Greater Occultation, suggesting that once the Shī’a were properly prepared for the Imam’s extended period of absence, an emissary or representative was no longer needed.⁸⁸ Western scholars have suggested other answers. 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 *sifāra*.”⁸⁹ Other individuals had claimed to be in contact with the Hidden Imam or claimed to be his deputy (*wakīl*) or gate (*bāb*), both before al-Samurī’s death during the lifetime of al-Nawbakhtī—such as the famed mystic and poet Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) and Abū Ja’far Muḥammad al-Shalmaghānī (d. 323/934), the one-time protégé and proxy of al-Nawbakhtī⁹⁰—and shortly after al-Samurī’s passing—such as Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, the nephew of the second *safīr*.⁹¹ At least one person came forward

87 On these alleged miracles, see al-Mūsawī, *al-Ḥayra*, 223–39; ‘Alī, *al-Mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 239–40. On the theme of miraculous powers ascribed to the *sufarā’*, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 273–5.

88 See, for example, Gulpāyigānī, *Discussions Concerning al-Mahdī*, 125–6.

89 Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis,” 508.

90 Iqbāl, *Khāndān-i Nawbakhtī*, 111–6 (regarding al-Ḥallāj), 222–39 (regarding al-Shalmaghānī); Massignon, *La Passion*, 1:362, 373, 376–7 (regarding al-Ḥallāj); Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 42; Anthony, “Nawbakhti Family,” *Elr* (online); Abdulsater, “Dynamics of Absence,” 316–320. Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 397–412, mentions six “imprecated” individuals in a chapter titled “Mention of the disgraced ones (*al-madhūmīn*; cf. Quran 17:22) [as opposed to the *sufarā’* who are called ‘the praised ones’ (*al-maḥmūdīn*)] who falsely claimed to be the gate of the Imam (*bābīyya*) and his *safīr*.” See also al-Majlisī, *ʿAyn al-ḥayāt*, 1198–1201.

91 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 412–4; Hussain, *The Occultation*, 139; Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis,” 509; Hayes, “The Envoys,” 504–5.

claiming to be the Hidden Imam himself.⁹² Research has uncovered that several Shī'a with gnostic (*ghulāt*) tendencies, such as Abū Shu'ayb Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr (fl. third/ninth century), had previously claimed authority on behalf of the Imam as well.⁹³

The final *tawqīf* announcing the second *ghayba* reflects a community that had lost hope in the Imam's reappearance. By the time of al-Samurī, it must have become impossible to keep up the pretense of direct communication with an absent Imam. In the year 329/941, the Hidden Imam would have approached the seventy-fifth year of his life; no previous Imam had exceeded the age of sixty-five, and the previous three Imams (the ninth, tenth, and eleventh Imams) had died at the ages of twenty-five, forty-two, and twenty-eight respectively. The Imāmī/Twelve Shī'a were not used to the idea of an Imam living so long. The believers must have begun questioning when, if ever, the Hidden Imam would emerge. Some likely wondered why, if someone's life was to be miraculously prolonged by God and thereby transcend the laws of nature, it had not been the Prophet or one of the earlier Imams.

The religious and political context needs to be taken into consideration, as it is of great significance. Two politically and culturally distinct Zaydī Shī'ī communities led by competing Shī'ī Imams were flourishing in northern Persia and Yemen, respectively.⁹⁴ Moreover, shortly after the death of al-'Askarī, an active Ismā'īlī *da'wa* emerged and gained ground in the central Islamic lands. The Ismā'īlī *du'ā* preached political and military action (ruled by caliph-imams—in the case of the Fatimid Ismā'īlīs—who were regarded as representatives of the Qā'im and who ruled the empire of the Mahdī) in contradistinction to the political quietism practiced by the Imāmī/Twelve Shī'a, who appeased and placated the ruling pro-Shī'ī Buyids. The Buyids were likely Zaydī Shī'a, and it is clear why the quietist approach of Imāmī/Twelve Shī'ī ulama, and their belief in an invisible Imam who did not exercise any outward political authority, may have appealed to the Buyids politically.

Consequently, the Buyids extended their patronage to Twelver Shī'ī scholars.⁹⁵ It is of no minor significance that the final *tawqīf* of the Hidden Imam,

92 See Klemm, "Die vier *sufarā*," 133.

93 See Asatryan, *Controversies in Formative Shi'ī Islam*, 80–4, 111–6. On the Nuṣayrī movement and its founder, see also Steigerwald, "Ibn Nuṣayr," *EI*³ (online).

94 On the Zaydiyya, see Halm, *Die Schia*, 244–50; Haider, *Shī'ī Islam*, 103–22, 169–81; Haider, "Zaydism."

95 On Buyid support for the Twelver Shī'a and the overall conditions of the Shī'ī community under Buyid rule, see Halm, *Shi'ism*, 45–8; Ja'fariyān, *Tārīkh-i tashayyu' dar Iran*, 1:359–70; Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty*; Marcinkowski, *Shi'ite Identities*, 75–6; Letvik, "Iraq x," *Elr*, 13:581–8; Nagel, "Buyid," *Elr*, 4:578–86.

which sundered all contact with him, was allegedly produced less than five years before the Buyids seized control of central Iraq. Surviving members of the notable Nawbakhtī family and other Twelver Shīʿī authorities in Iraq who had supported the institution of *sifāra* decided it was wiser for the Shīʿa to have an invisible—and more importantly and prudently—an unreachable Imam to whom they could keep their spiritual allegiance, than to continue the failing and politically hazardous experiment of living emissaries and representatives of the Imam.⁹⁶ It was then left to Shīʿī ulama to justify this shift. The continued existence and growth of Twelver Shīʿī Islam proved that this development kept the nascent community intact.

3.2 *From the Second Ghayba to the Complete Ghayba*

The most reliable edition of *Kamāl al-dīn* was prepared by ʿAlī-Akbar al-Ghaffārī, who consulted seven different manuscripts. In a footnote to the locution “the second *ghayba*” (*al-ghayba al-thāniya*), al-Ghaffārī writes that “some manuscripts” have “the complete occultation” (*al-ghayba al-tamma*).⁹⁷ *Al-ghayba al-tamma* is almost certainly a later redaction introduced by al-Ṭūsī or a member of the unnamed group (*jamāʿa*) that transmitted the hadith from al-Ṣadūq to al-Ṭūsī. This interpolation was likely reintroduced into some later transcriptions of al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn* to make it conform with the version in al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba*,⁹⁸ since it is highly unlikely that *al-ghayba al-tamma* would be changed to *al-ghayba al-thāniya* otherwise. Al-Ṭūsī’s version was cited by Aḥmad al-Ṭabarsī (d. late sixth/twelfth century) in his *al-Ihtijāj ʿalā ahl al-lajāj* and subsequently by most Shīʿī scholars that followed,⁹⁹ though a small number have preserved al-Ṣadūq’s *al-ghayba al-thāniya*.

This alteration of *al-ghayba al-thāniya* in al-Ṣadūq’s version to *al-ghayba al-tamma* in al-Ṭūsī’s version is significant because neither al-Nuʿmānī nor al-

96 Eliash, “Removal of the Divine,” 226–7; Maghen, “Occultation in Perpetuum,” 238, 246.

97 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn* (1984 Qum edition), 2:516 n. 1.

98 The oldest manuscript of *Kamāl al-dīn* available to me, from the twelfth/eighteenth century, has “the complete *ghayba*” (*al-ghayba al-tamma*). See 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-thāniya*). Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn* (ms. 2), folio 284. Pahlavān’s Persian translation of *Kamāl al-dīn* also has “second *ghayba*” (*duvvumīn ghaybat*). Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn* (trans. Pahlavān), 2:294. Kamarīhī’s Persian translation, on the other hand, has “complete *ghayba*” (*ghaybat-i kāmīl*). Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn* (trans. Kamarīhī), 2:193. On information about surviving manuscripts of *Kamāl al-dīn* in Iran, see Tafaqḍulī, *Kitābshināsī-i*, 206–28.

99 Al-Ṭabarsī, *al-Ihtijāj*, 2:478.

Ṣadūq ever mentions the idea of a “complete *ghayba*.” The term *al-ghayba al-tāmma* is not found in any of their extant writings. Rather, both al-Nu‘mānī and al-Ṣadūq use the expression “the second *ghayba*” throughout their works.¹⁰⁰

4 “A Lying Impostor”

Initially, the final *tawqī‘* of the Imam was understood to mean that no one could claim to see the Imam after the start of the second *ghayba*. In his extended defense of the *ghayba*, al-Ṣadūq devoted a lengthy chapter to accounts of those who had seen and spoken with the Hidden Imam.¹⁰¹ The chain of transmission and text of these accounts reveals that all of them are from the Lesser Occultation.¹⁰²

Here, the position of scholars who suggest that al-Ṣadūq (and al-Ṭūsī after him) cited accounts of contact with the Imam from the Greater Occultation needs to be reconsidered. Amir-Moezzi, for example, remarks that although al-Ṣadūq cites the final *tawqī‘* 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 [that is, during the second *ghayba*—again, the term “major occultation” is never used by al-Ṣadūq].” Based on this premise, to which I will return presently, Amir-Moezzi avers:

From the very beginning, ocular vision of the imam, to which the letter [i.e., the final *tawqī‘*] 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* [i.e., *niyāba*] 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

100 See, e.g., al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn* (1984 Qum edition), 1:139, 1:146, and the examples provided above in al-Nu‘mānī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba*.

101 [= *man shāhada al-qā‘im wa-ra‘āhu wa-kallamahu*]

102 The same is true for the reports mentioned in the chapters in al-Mufid’s *al-Irshād fī ma‘rifat ḥujaj Allāh ‘alā l-‘ibād* and in al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba* on those who saw the Hidden Imam or witnessed his miracles (*mu‘jizātihi*). Al-Mufid, *al-Irshād fī ma‘rifat ḥujaj Allāh ‘alā l-‘ibād*, 2:351–67; al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 253–84. All of the accounts mentioned in these works date from the Lesser Occultation. For more information on these works, see below.

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.¹⁰³

Two issues arise in relation to this argument. First, the interpretation that the *tawqīf* means that believers can see the Imam as long as they do not claim to be his “representative” was not explicitly advanced until some eight hundred years after the beginning of the *ghayba* by the Safavid savant, Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, a point to which I will return in chapter 4.¹⁰⁴ Second, Amir-Moezzi argues 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.”¹⁰⁵ But is this the case? The *tawqīf* does not declare that anyone who

103 Amir-Moezzi, “Islam in Iran vii,” *Elr*, 11:140. Amir-Moezzi gives the same explanation in Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *Qu’est-ce que le shī’isme?*, 117 [= Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *What is Shi’i Islam?* (trans. Casler and Ormsby), 63] and in Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 123 (italics added for emphasis): “Ibn Bābūya [al-Ṣadūq] semble être le premier à reproduire cette lettre [i.e., the final *tawqīf*]. Il rapporte pourtant des récits de rencontres pendant l’occultation majeure, et son exemple sera suivi par les auteurs postérieurs. *C’est que dès le début, la vision oculaire de l’imâm caché dont parle la lettre paraît avoir été comprise non pas dans un sens général, mais comme une condition de la représentation de l’imâm.* Ce qui est déclaré impossible pendant l’occultation majeure, et donc jusqu’à la Fin du temps, ce n’est pas la rencontre de l’imâm caché mais la prétention à la *niyāba* de ce dernier sous prétexte de rencontre. Le fidèle peut être gratifié du privilège de la vision oculaire de l’imâm, mais si par la suite et en raison de cette rencontre il se déclare ‘représentant’ de l’imâm, il ne peut être considéré, selon les termes de la lettre, que comme un menteur et un imposteur.” Amir-Moezzi’s understanding is also conveyed in the following translation of the critical sentence of the final *tawqīf*, to which he has added a qualifier in brackets: “Among my partisans, some will claim to having seen [me] with their eyes [as was the case with the ‘representatives’].” Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 113. A similar view was expressed by Corbin; after citing the final *tawqīf*, Corbin argues: “Ainsi commença le temps de la Grande Occultation (*al-ghaybat al-kobrā*); il dure encore. *Car non seulement quiconque prétendrait être l’Imâm en personne, mais aussi quiconque prétendrait se donner comme le représentant qualifié de l’Imâm (son Bâb, son Seuil) et revendiquerait une investiture personnelle en vue d’une prédication publique, celui-là briserait l’attente qui est essentielle au sentiment eschatologique shī’ite*, et en voulant anticiper sur la parousie, se mettrait *eo ipso* en dehors du shī’isme. La chose est arrivée, nous le savons; ce fut la tragédie du bābisme, puis du behâ’isme.” Corbin, “Au Pays de l’Imâm caché,” 45 (italics added for emphasis). See also Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 70 [= Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, 110].

104 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, before al-Majlisī, who advanced this interpretation, but neither appears to have mentioned the *niyāba* interpretation explicitly in this connection.

105 Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 136 [= Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 326]. A similar reading was given earlier by Hussain, *The Occultation*, 135.

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 *tawqīr* 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 states that al-Ṣadūq records accounts in his *Kamāl al-dīn* of sightings of the Imam from after the Lesser Occultation.¹⁰⁶ The Qajar-era Shī'ī hadith specialist Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī put forward this argument, which "Grand Ayatollah" Luṭf Allāh al-Ṣāfi al-Gulpāyigānī (b. 1918) repeated. Both al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī and al-Ṣāfi al-Gulpāyigānī allege that al-Ṭūsī (rather than al-Ṣadūq), who, as we have seen, also recorded the final *tawqīr*, ignored the critical sentence about "a lying impostor" and included stories of encounters with the Imam, during the Greater Occultation, in his *Kitāb al-Ghayba* (on which, see below).¹⁰⁷

In his "Contribution á la Typologie des Rencontres avec l'Imâm Caché," Amir-Moezzi cites two accounts from al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn* that, according to Amir-Moezzi, occurred during the second *ghayba*: (1) the account of 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār¹⁰⁸ and (2) an account of a believer from Hamadan who was saved from certain death in the desert.¹⁰⁹ A close examination of these

106 Mīr-Lawḥī Sabzavārī (fl. eleventh/seventeenth century) also claimed that accounts of encounters with the Imam during the period of the Greater Occultation are transmitted in al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn*, though he did not provide any specific examples. Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 638.

107 See al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, 146; al-Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 400 n. 1.

108 Amir-Moezzi, "Contribution à la Typologie," 129 (Récit d' Ibrāhīm b. 'Alī b. Mahziyār (IV/Xe s.)).

109 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 titled "Au temps de la 'Grande Occultation'"). See also Corbin, "Mundus Imaginalis," 29–30. A third account from the fourth/tenth century (though not found in al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn*), which Amir-Moezzi places in the Greater Occultation, is the story of a Shī'ī 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. eleventh/seventeenth century) *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 583–4, citing as his source al-Ḥasan b. Ḥamza al-'Alawī al-Ṭabarsī's (fl. fourth/tenth century) *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, which has not survived. It is important to note that Sabzavārī does not mention this account in the chapter of his work dealing with reports of the Greater Occultation. This suggests that he regarded the account as having occurred during the Lesser Occultation. The only other Shī'ī scholar I am aware of who cites this account is the contemporary cleric "Grand Ayatollah" Luṭf Allāh al-Ṣāfi al-Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 391, citing as his source *Arba'īn-i Khātūnābādī*, a reference to the collection of forty hadiths also known as *Kashf al-ḥaqq* by the Qajar-era Isfahan-based scholar Mīr

two accounts, however, suggests that they are, in fact, from the period of the Lesser Occultation:

(1) The story of ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī begins when a stranger appears to him in a dream and commands him to perform the hajj, with the promise that he will meet the Hidden Imam in Mecca. Upon waking, al-Ahwāzī immediately sets out from his native Iraq for the Hijaz. One night in Mecca, while circumambulating the Ka’ba, he sees “a comely and sweet-smelling youth wearing a mantle.” The youth knows al-Ahwāzī and his family, though al-Ahwāzī has never met him. He guides al-Ahwāzī out of Mecca and they ride to the mountains of Tā’if. The youth points to a tent bursting with light, pitched on a nearby hill.¹¹⁰ As the two approach the tent, the youth turns to al-Ahwāzī and declares, “This land is sacred. Only a friend of God (*walī*) enters it and only a friend of God takes leave from it.”¹¹¹ 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-colored 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 had a broad forehead, beautifully arched eyebrows, large deep-black 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 himself and the Shī’a for the appearance of the Imam, for “the Hour is nigh” (Quran 54:1).¹¹²

Muḥammad Ṣādiq Khātūnābādī (d. 1272/1856). Al-Gulpāyigānī places this account in a chapter of his work on miracles performed by the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation and states in a footnote that in all likelihood the story is from the period of the Lesser Occultation. Al-Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 391 n. 1.

110 Cf. the tabernacle or tent of meeting where Moses met with God. 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-Kāfi*, 3:219) with a light inside that will continue to shine until he rises with the sword. Al-Nu’mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 245 (no. 31); al-Mas’ūdī (attrib.), *Ithbāt al-waṣīyya*, 267; al-Ṭūsī, *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),” 618–9.

111 Cf. the words spoken to Moses as he approached the burning bush in Exodus 3:4–5 and Quran 20:12.

112 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 424–7 (no. 23). Also cited in al-Bahrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 109–15 (no. 49); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:42–6 (no. 32). The account is referred to in pass-

The early Shīʿī sources feature three other stories that are similar to the above account: the story of Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār (this account, also mentioned by al-Ṣadūq, parallels the above account but features the jarring presence of the Hidden Imam's brother, whose name is Mūsā, in his tent)¹¹³ and two stories of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār.¹¹⁴

The identity of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī has been a subject of debate among Shīʿī scholars. In the *rijāl* works, an ʿAlī b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī is identified as a non-Arab client (*mawlā*) from Ahwāz and a companion or confidant of the eighth, ninth, and tenth Imams.¹¹⁵ The early sources identify him as the son of a Christian convert from India¹¹⁶ and a prolific author of some thirty-one books (none of which have survived).¹¹⁷ Ibn Bābūya (the father of al-Ṣadūq) states that he was the brother of Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār,¹¹⁸

ing in Amir Arjomand, "Imam *Absconditus*," 6; Amir Arjomand, "Islamic Apocalypticism," 268. The text is ambiguous about whether the youth is the Imam or a different person. Scholars who have commented on this account or translated it into Persian have said that the youth is a special servant of the Imam, a reading that appears to be influenced by the hadiths discussed in chapter 2. The text is perhaps intentionally inconclusive.

- 113 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 408–14 (no. 19); al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 80–90 (no. 46); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:32–7 (no. 28); Nūrī-Ṭabarsī², *Kifāyat al-muwaḥḥidīn*, 2:809–11; Hayes, "The Envoys," 343 n. 150. Al-Shaftī, *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, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 641, identifies Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār and his son Muḥammad as two of the Hidden Imam's representatives during the Lesser Occultation.
- 114 The first story is mentioned in al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 263–7 (no. 228); al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 156–61 (no. 65); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:9–12 (no. 6); Ardabīlī (attrib.), *Ḥadiqat al-shīʿa*, 2:977–80 (Persian translation); Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 603–7 (Persian translation). Al-Majlisī translated the version from al-Ṭūsī which he claimed has a sound *isnād* in al-Majlisī, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 340–43. The second story is mentioned in al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, 539–42 (no. 522); al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 143–7 (no. 60); al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-māʾūjiz*, 8:115–8 (no. 2732). A shortened version of the second story is recorded in Ḥasan b. Sulaymān al-Ḥillī's *Mukhtaṣar baṣāʾir*, 176–7, who cites his teacher al-Nīlī as his source. See also al-Nīlī, *al-Sultān al-mufarrij*, 92–3 (account 16). On *Mukhtaṣar baṣāʾir* and questions of its attribution to al-Ḥillī, see Anṣārī, *Tashayyuʿ-i imāmi*, 180 ff.
- 115 See Pakatchi (trans. Melvin-Koushki), "Alī b. Mahziyār," 110.
- 116 See Buyukkara, "The Imami Shīʿī Movement," 410; Amir-Arjomand, "The Crisis," 498, 500.
- 117 A *Kitāb al-Malāḥim* [likely on the subject of end time calamities] and a *Kitāb al-Qāʾim* are ascribed to him. The latter was almost certainly written to refute the Wāqifi claims about Mūsā al-Kāẓim. These sources are 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," 500. See also Hussain, *The Occultation*, 4; Watt, "Sidelights on Early Imāmite Doctrine," 294; Buyukkara, "The Schism," 92; Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin* 251.
- 118 Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma wa-l-tabṣira min al-ḥayra*², 201 (no. 56); at 234 (no. 83), he also narrates from ʿAlī b. Mahziyār.

whom al-Ṭūsī lists as one of the companions of the ninth and tenth Imams,¹¹⁹ and who was likely the father of the ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār al-Ahwāzī mentioned in the above account. ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār’s brother, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār (also called Muḥammad b. Mahziyār) was a close deputy (*wakīl*) of the eleventh Imam.¹²⁰ Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār is said to have had doubts about al-‘Askarī’s successor before witnessing a miracle which he attributed to the Hidden Imam’s miraculous powers.¹²¹ Moreover, an ‘Alī b. Mahziyār is mentioned as al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī’s servant, who helped to conceal the Hidden Imam during al-‘Askarī’s lifetime.¹²²

Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī mentions the names of Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār and ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār as two of the individuals who encountered the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation, but he is quick to add that in his opinion, a mistake (*isthibāh*) was made in one of these names and in fact, all the accounts refer to a single person (an agent of the eleventh Imam who likewise met the Hidden Imam) and a single episode.¹²³ To my knowledge, other than Amir-Moezzi, no other scholar has suggested that any of these four accounts took place during the period of the Greater Occultation, and since Amir-Moezzi has not provided evidence for his statement, it is difficult to assess. All other writers who have cited or referred to these accounts have placed them in the period of the first *ghayba*, that is, during the Lesser Occultation.¹²⁴

(2) The only other encounter with the Hidden Imam recorded by al-Ṣadūq that Amir-Moezzi (and Corbin before him) suggest took place during the period of the Greater Occultation is that of Aḥmad b. Fāris al-Adīb. Al-Ṣadūq says that he heard this account from one of his teachers, a scholar of hadith named Aḥmad b. Fāris al-Adīb, likely a reference to the man of letters Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Fāris b. Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī al-Hamadhānī al-Rāzī (b. 308/920; d.

119 Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī*, 374, 383.

120 Al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl al-Ṭūsī*, 402, mentions that he was a companion of the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. See also al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 406 (no. 16); al-Nīlī, *Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍī’a*, 295; al-Amīn, *A’yān al-Shī’a*, 2:71; al-Shīrāzī, *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī*, 109. Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 638, identifies Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Mahziyār as the deputy of the Imam in Ahwāz.

121 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:518 (no. 5); al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād fī ma’rifat hujaj Allāh ‘alā l-‘ibād*, 2:355–6; Hayes, “The Envoys,” 339–51. This account is repeated in numerous works in chapters about the miracles performed by the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation. See al-Nīlī, *Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍī’a*, 215 n. 8, for references.

122 See Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i ‘aṣr*, 106–8.

123 Al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 1:448. See also al-Tustarī, *al-Akhhbār al-dakhīla*, 104–8.

124 See e.g., al-Ḥā’irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 1:328, and the references provided in the accounts above.

ca. 395/1004–5) known as Ibn Fāris.¹²⁵ According to this account, while in Hamadan, Ibn Fāris heard a story about a group of people known as the Banū Rāshid who were all Shī'a (*ahl al-imāma*). When asked about how they became Shī'a, 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 khadrā'*) with a luminous palace (*qaṣr*) guarded by two white servants (*khādimayn abyādayn*). After receiving permission to enter the palace, he walked into a room with a large sword hanging from the ceiling. Here he encountered a youth (*fatā*) described as being as luminous as the full moon (*ka-anna al-fatā badrun yalūh*). The youth introduced himself as the Qā'im who will appear at the end of time. The sword above his head symbolized that he would fill the world with justice and equity. He then asked the pilgrim from Hamadan (whom he knew intimately) if he wished to return to his family. Signaling for 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 Asadābād which resembles this area." The servant responded, "This is Asadābād!" 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 forty or fifty *dīnārs*. He then rushed home to his family in Hamadan.¹²⁶ It is not stated but under-

125 On him, see Gökkir and Leaman, "Ibn Faris, Abu'l-Husayn," 180–1. He was a prolific grammarian, author of the lexicon *Mu'jam maqāyīs al-lughā*, and a teacher of the famed Arabo-Persian litterateur Aḥmad Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008). See al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, 3:60–2; al-Shāhrūdī, *Mustadrak safinat al-bihār*, 8:177; al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 90 n. 10. Al-Khū'ī, *Mu'jam rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 2:199, indicates that Ibn Fāris lived for some time in Hamadan before moving to Ray, where he died in 375/985–6 or 390/999–1000.

126 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn* 414–5 (no. 20). Also cited in al-Ṭūsī, *al-Thāqīb fī l-manāqīb*, 605–6 (no. 553); al-Nīlī, *al-Sulṭān al-mufarrīj*, 62–4 (no. 12); Ardabīlī (attrib.), *Ḥadīqat al-shī'a*, 2:967–9 (Persian); Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* 634–6 (Persian); al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 52:40–2 (no. 30); al-Majlisī, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 339–40 (Persian); al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 90–3; al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-ma'ājiz*, 8:183–5 (no. 2781); al-Baḥrānī, *Hilyat al-abrār*, 5:230–2 (no. 3); al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:298–9; al-Ḥā'irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 1:356–7; al-Qummi, *Muntahā l-āmāl fī tawārīkh al-nabī wa-l-āl 'alayhim al-salām*, 3:2022–4; al-Baḥrānī and al-Marzūq, *Mawsū'at al-qīṣaṣ*, 122–4; Qummi, *Nigāhī bar zindiq-i chahārdah ma'sum*, 559–61 (Persian). The story is still very popular and is cited in many contemporary books about the Hidden Imam. See, for example, Āl Quṭayṭ, *Salū l-mahdī 'an dawlatihī*, 405; Āshūr, *Mawsū'at ahl al-bayt*, 19:73–4. A similar account is recorded in al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'ih* 2, 788–9 (no. 112); al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī* 204–5 (no. 69). Shūshṭarī, *Majlis al-mu'minīn*, 80, alludes to this account, and states that according to al-Rāwandī's *al-Kharā'ij*, "some of the families of Hamadan were Shī'a and became Shī'a as a result of a miracle."

stood that after hearing of this incident, the tribe known as Banū Rāshid all converted to Imāmī/Twelver Shīʿī Islam.

Prior to Corbin and Amir-Moezzi, only two other scholars placed this story in the period of the Greater Occultation.¹²⁷ This opinion does not appear to be correct. There is no date in the account itself, but it is clear that al-Ṣadūq heard it from Ibn Fāris al-Adīb earlier than 368/978–9, when he completed *Kamāl al-dīn*. Based on this fact, we can conclude that Ibn Fāris in turn must have heard the story sometime during the last part of the Lesser Occultation or the early years of the Greater Occultation. Ibn Fāris explicitly says that the account is about the forefather (*jadd*) of the one of the believers in Hamadan. The word *jadd* denotes both “grandfather” and “ancestor.”¹²⁸ Assuming that this *jadd* was not alive when Ibn Fāris heard the story (or presumably, Ibn Fāris would have heard the account directly from the *jadd* rather than from an elder of Hamadan), we can be almost certain that the account is from the time of the Lesser Occultation. This is, in fact, the consensus of opinion among Shīʿī scholars about the story: al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī recorded the account in chapter 6 of his *Najm-i thāqib* as one of the forty most popular stories of miracles associated with the Hidden Imam from the time of the Lesser Occultation;¹²⁹ Asad Allāh al-Shaftī (d. 1290/1873) and Ismāʿīl Aḥmad Nūrī-Ṭabarsī (d. 1900–1, not to be confused with Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī) likewise recorded the account in the chapters of their respective works dealing with believers who saw and recognized the Imam during the Lesser Occultation;¹³⁰ and al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī (d. 1306/1888–9, 1308/1890–1 or 1310/1892–3) included the story in the chapter of his book that concerns those who saw the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation or soon after it.¹³¹ Additionally, al-Ḥāʿirī al-Yazdī (d. 1915) and ʿAbbās al-Qummī (d. 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 an encounter with the Imam that took place during the Lesser Occultation.¹³² Furthermore, all of the other twenty-five accounts in the chapter of al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn* on

127 Ardabilī (attrib.), *Ḥadiqat al-Shīʿa*, 967–8; al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī, *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.

128 Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:385.

129 Al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 1:428–30 (no. 27).

130 Al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 1:360–2; al-Nūrī-Ṭabarsī², *Kifāyat al-muwaḥḥidīn fi ʿaqāyid al-dīn*, 2:811–2.

131 Al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 315–7 (no. 21).

132 Al-Ḥāʿirī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 1:356–7; al-Qummī, *Muntahā l-āmāl fi tawārīkh al-nabī wa-l-āl ʿalayhim al-salām*, 3:2022–4.

believers who saw the Imam are from the Lesser Occultation, and al-Ṣadūq does not even hint that the two accounts mentioned above are an exception.

Al-Ṣadūq does note one (and only one) person who saw the Imam during the second *ghayba*, though this account appears in a different section of his work—and this person is al-Ṣadūq himself. In the introduction to *Kamāl al-dīn*, al-Ṣadūq recounts that one night, while he was deeply disturbed by the doubts and confusion about the Imam's absence that continued to haunt the Shī'ī community, he dreamt that he was standing next to the Black Stone of the 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 by looking at his face. He suggested that al-Ṣadūq write a book about the *ghayba*. When al-Ṣadūq responded, "I have already written many things about the *ghayba*,"¹³³ the Imam answered that what al-Ṣadūq (or others) have written was not what he had in mind. He then ordered him to write a new book that would focus on the prophets who appeared before him and who had likewise disappeared or had their lives miraculously prolonged by God.¹³⁴ In al-Ṣadūq's

133 [= *qad ṣannaftu fī l-ghayba ašhyā'a*] Al-Ṣadūq's words can also be translated as "Many things have already been written about the *ghayba* [by others]" (*qad ṣunnifāt fī l-ghayba ašhyā'u*).

134 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 15. Referred to in Vilozny, "What Makes a Religion Perfect?" 477–8; Amir Arjomand, "The Consolation of Theology," 555; Tafaḍḍulī, *Kitābshināsī-i*, 207; al-Jahrumī, *Ri'āyat al-imām al-mahdī*, 51–3. Shī'ī scholars continue to cite al-Ṣadūq's dream of the Hidden Imam as proof of "the blessings" that have been bestowed on "traditionalists, theologians and scholars, who have compiled comprehensive books on each and every topic concerning Imam-e-Zamana, thereby clarifying the discussions in their entirety." [Gulpāyigānī], *Traditional Reports on the Hidden Imam* (trans. Rizvi), iii. Rizvi adds, "The significance of working on this subject can be gauged from the fact that Imam-e-Zamana himself ordered Shaikh Saduq to pen a book on occultation." See also al-Jahrumī, *Ri'āyat al-imām al-mahdī*, 51–3. In the modern period, other Shī'ī scholars have claimed, like al-Ṣadūq, that the Imam appeared to them or someone close to them in a dream and ordered them to write books about him. Mīrzā Muḥammad-Taqī al-Mūsawī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1930), author of *Mikyāl al-makārim fī fawā'id al-du'ā' li-l-qā'im*—a long work about the Hidden Imam, the duties of believers towards the Imam, and the benefits of praying for the Imam—states that the Hidden Imam commanded him in Persian in a dream to write *Mikyāl al-makārim* in Arabic, after the Imam delivered him from an outbreak of cholera in Mecca in 1912. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Mikyāl al-makārim*, 1:14. Ḥasan al-Shīrāzī (d. 1983), who established the Zaynabiyya Shī'ī *ḥawza* in Damascus, recounted to his students that when he was imprisoned and tortured by members of the Ba'th party in Iraq, he pledged to the Hidden Imam that he would write a book about the Imam if he was released from prison. After being freed, two different people said to him that they were prompted in dreams to remind al-Shīrāzī that the time has come to fulfill his pledge to the Imam. He then set out to write *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī*, a collection of the *tawqī'āt*, prayers, and sayings of the Hidden Imam. Upon finishing the most important section of this book, al-Shīrāzī

oneiric encounter with the Imam is the implication that the Imam can appear in dreams (at least he can appear specifically in al-Ṣadūq’s dream).¹³⁵ The fact that al-Ṣadūq was careful to point out that his encounter took place in a dream is itself significant. The idea that the Imam can appear in a dream must certainly have been an innocuous proposition to advance in the context of Buyid rule, when the nascent Twelver Shīʿī community was actively attempting to portray itself as apolitical vis-à-vis the Zaydī Shīʿa and the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿa who posed a political and military challenge to the Buyid confederacy. Al-Ṣadūq never alleges that he saw the Imam in a wakeful state, as such a claim would presumably have had different implications. While he does not say so directly, it is possible that al-Ṣadūq understood the “lying impostor” passage of the final *tawqīʿ* as applying only to those who claimed to see the Imam physically and materially, in a wakeful state. In sum, al-Ṣadūq does not record any accounts of any other ulama or individuals who met the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation, either awake or asleep.

5 Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd

Following al-Ṣadūq, the most prominent Shīʿī teacher and leading Shīʿī jurist and theologian of the late fourth/tenth century was his student, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmān al-Baghdādī al-Karkhī, known as Ibn al-Muʿallim and more commonly, as I refer to him here, as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (lit., ‘the beneficial/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-Mufīd was held in great esteem by the court and was often invited to debate other thinkers. Although the Shīʿa enjoyed unprecedented freedoms in Baghdad under the Buyids, al-Mufīd’s prominence made him the object of Sunnī attacks and he was exiled from the Abbasid capital following Sunnī-Shīʿī riots on at least three different occasions.¹³⁶

himself experienced a vision of a figure who kissed his hands and introduced himself as having been sent by the Imam. Al-Shīrāzī concluded that this man was an emissary of the Hidden Imam, who had been sent to thank al-Shīrāzī on behalf of the Imam for the book. Al-Shīrāzī, *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī*, 6–8. *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī* is part of a 25-volume collection by al-Shīrāzī aiming to compile the words of the Prophet Muhammad, the twelve Imams, significant companions of the Prophet, and other members of his family (e.g., Fāṭima and Zaynab).

135 On the importance of this dream, see Viložny, “What Makes a Religion Perfect?” 477 ff.

136 On al-Mufīd and his thought, see al-Amīnī, *Muʿallim al-Shīʿa: al-Shaykh al-Mufīd*; Yūnus, *Taṭawwūr al-fīkr*, 110–26; Ansārī, *Lʾimamat*, 94–8; Anṣārī, *Tashayyūʿ-i imāmī*, 23–37; Zan-

Al-Mufid is widely credited with reviving the rationalist orientation that had been in abeyance in Baghdad since the time of the Nawbakhtīs in the early fourth/tenth century.¹³⁷ He and his students developed the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and assigned reason (*‘aql*) a fundamental role in the acquisition of religious knowledge.¹³⁸ They also severely weakened the traditionalists. Al-Ṣadūq, a teacher of al-Mufid, was stringently criticized by al-Mufid, and is widely considered the last of the great classical Shī‘ī traditionists.

Al-Mufid devoted several works to questions of the imamate and the *ghayba*.¹³⁹ In one of his earlier works, *al-Irshād fī ma‘rifat ḥujaj Allāh ‘alā l-‘ibād*, better known as the *Kitāb al-Irshād*, written around 380/990, he recorded many accounts of encounters that took place during the Lesser Occultation, accounts that are mentioned by al-Kulaynī though, unlike al-Kulaynī, he did not consider these accounts as primary proof of the Imam’s existence.¹⁴⁰ In the final chapter of *Kitāb al-Irshād*, he rearticulates (following al-Nu‘mānī) the doctrine of two *ghaybas*:

وَلَهُ قَبْلَ قِيَامِهِ غَيْبَتَانِ إِحْدَاهُمَا أَطْوَلُ مِنَ الْأُخْرَى كَمَا جَاءَتْ بِذَلِكَ الْأَخْبَارُ فَأَمَّا الْقُصْرَى
مِنْهُمَا فَمُنْذُ وَقْتِ مَوْلِدِهِ إِلَى انْقِطَاعِ السَّفَارَةِ بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ شِيعَتِهِ وَعَدَمِ السُّفْرَاءِ بِالْوَفَاةِ وَأَمَّا الطُّوْلَى
فَهِىَ بَعْدَ الْأُولَى وَفِي آخِرِهَا يَقُومُ بِالسَّيْفِ

As has been narrated in the hadiths [of the Imams], before his rise, [the Hidden Imam] has two *ghaybas*, one longer than the other. The shorter of the two lasted from [the Imam’s] birth to the point when the function performed by the those who served as emissaries between him and his Shī‘a was suspended and there were no longer any emissaries

jānī, “Shaykh Mufid,” *DMT*, 10:178–85; Madelung, “Mufid, Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad,” *ET*², 7:312–3; Bayhom-Daou, *Shaykh al-Mufid*; Kadhim, “Politics and Theology,” 47–81; Kadhim, “Ṣayḥ Mufid and the Refinement of Shī‘ī Theology”; McDermott, *The Theology*; Sourdel, “L’Imamisme,” 217–96; Howard, “Introduction,” xxi–xxvii; Abdulsater, “Traditionalist Spirits and Rationalist Bodies,” 13–8.

137 On the dominance of the Nawbakhtīs in Baghdad during the period of the Lesser Occultation, in particular the role of the jurist and theologian, Abū Sahl Ismā‘īl al-Nawbakhtī (d. 311/923–4), see Amir Arjomand, “The Crisis,” 502–7; Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, index, s.v. “Abū Sahl al-Nawbakhtī”; Klemm, “Die vier *sufarā*,” 139–41 (Abū Sahl Ismā‘īl b. ‘Alī an-Nawbakhtī und sein Kreis).

138 See Halm, *Shī‘ism*, 48–56.

139 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 Tūsī,” 480.

140 Al-Mufid, *al-Irshād fī ma‘rifat ḥujaj Allāh ‘alā l-‘ibād*, 2:351–4. On this work, see Akhtar, *Early Shī‘ite Imāmīyah Thinkers*, 96–99.

because they had all died. The longer (*ghayba*) is after the first. At the end of it, [the Imam] will rise with the sword.¹⁴¹

Like al-Nu‘mānī, al-Mufid maintains that there are no longer any “gates” (*ab-wāb*, another term he uses in the same sense as emissaries/envoys/representatives)¹⁴² to establish contact between the Imam and the faithful or to impart knowledge to them. He suggests that the second *ghayba* may last forever. Elsewhere he states that the Imam may remain in hiding for one thousand years.¹⁴³

The arguments in al-Mufid’s later works on the *ghayba* are based on rational proofs (*dalā’il ‘aqliyya*), as opposed to *dalā’il naqliyya* or *sam’iyya*, that is, proofs derived from the text of the Quran and the hadiths of the Prophet and the Imams narrated on the authority of their companions. The generation of scholars that preceded al-Mufid was not shy about expressing their aversion to the Mu‘tazilīs, followers of a rationalist theological school that emphasized God’s justice and unity and was active in Iraq in the fourth/tenth century.¹⁴⁴ Al-Nu‘mānī considered the Mu‘tazilīs enemies of the Imams, similar to those who advocate (religious) innovations (*mubtadī‘īn*).¹⁴⁵ Al-Ṣadūq stated in his *Kamāl al-dīn* that the harsh attacks of the Mu‘tazilīs exacerbated the confusion and doubt that Shī‘a from Baghdad to Nishābūr were experiencing, and led many to renounce their faith.¹⁴⁶ By the time of al-Mufid, the traditional arguments fur-

141 Al-Mufid, *al-Irshād fi ma‘rifat ḥujaj Allāh ‘alā l-‘ibād*, 2:340 (for an alternative translation, see al-Mufid, *Kitāb al-Irshād* (trans. Howard), 525). Al-Mufid’s explanation is cited by a number of prominent ulama after him, including al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:949; ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (attrib.), *al-Mustajād min kitāb al-irshād*, 253–4; Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, *al-Fuṣūl al-muḥimma*, 2:1097–1100 (with minor differences); al-Kāshānī, *‘Ilm al-yaqīn*, 2:933–4; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:23–4 (no. 36); al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-ma‘ājiz*, 8:6; al-Ḥā‘irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 1:289; al-Gulpāyīgānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 321. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 87–8, comments that “al-Mufid does not embark on the question of the two forms of *ghayba* in his account of the twelfth Imam in *al-Irshād*,” a statement that clearly needs to be corrected.

142 Al-Murtaḍā[al-Mufid], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 318. This book is a compilation of passages from other works written by al-Mufid (that have not survived), mainly his *al-‘Uyūn wa-l-maḥāsīn* by his student al-Murtaḍā. See Akhtar, *Early Shī‘ite Imāmiyyah Thinkers*, 188.

143 Al-Murtaḍā[al-Mufid], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 319.

144 On the Mu‘tazilī movement and its Shī‘ī reception, see el-Omari, “Mu‘tazilite Movement (II): The Origins of the Mu‘tazila”; Bennett, “Mu‘tazilite Movement (II): The Early Mu‘tazilites”; Schmidtke, “Mu‘tazilite Movement (II): The Scholastic Phase”; Ansari and Schmidtke, “The Shī‘ī Reception of Mu‘tazilism (II): Twelver Shī‘īs.” All four chapters are published in Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*. See also ‘Aṭā’-Naḥārī, “Kalām-i shī‘ī va guftimān-i mu‘tazilī.”

145 Al-Nu‘mānī, *al-Ghayba*, 36.

146 For references, see Hussain, *The Occultation*, 144.

nished by al-Nu‘mānī and al-Ṣadūq were no longer adequate in the debates being conducted in cosmopolitan Baghdad. Al-Mufid and Shī‘ī scholars who followed him regularly engaged in dialogue with the Mu‘tazilī scholars of Iraq, some of whom were of Zaydī persuasion. To defend the doctrine of the *ghayba* to their rationalist interlocutors, they had to adduce rational proofs.

In his works, al-Mufid does not directly posit the possibility of encountering the Imam. In a key doctrinal text, in response to the question of what proof there is for the Imam’s existence (*mā l-dalil ‘alā wujūdihi*), he responds that every age must have an Imam who is protected by God from committing sin (*ma‘ṣūm*). Thus he emphasizes the key *ghayba* principle of the Shī‘ī rationalists, that is, *lutf*, or grace from God.¹⁴⁷ The argument stems from the Mu‘tazilī principles that (1) God is just and (2) human beings are responsible for their actions. Since humans are prone to error, and thus in need of guidance, and since the ruling caliphs are deemed sinful and tyrannical, God’s *lutf* (grace) obligates Him to provide at all times an authoritative source of guidance in the form of an Imam who has been protected (*ma‘ṣūm*)¹⁴⁸ by Him from committing error. And if this Imam is not present, he must be in hiding. A reader might expect here mention or some discussion of the Imam appearing to his followers as evidence of his existence, but the subject is not broached.

The question remains, can anyone ever see the Imam or benefit from his guidance? In his *al-Masā’il al-‘ashar fī l-ghayba*,¹⁴⁹ one of his last works, completed near the end of 411/1021,¹⁵⁰ al-Mufid responds to this question by defending the doctrine of the *ghayba*. On the question of seeing the Imam, he responds: “A group of the companions of [the eleventh Imam] al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī saw his successor [that is, the Hidden Imam] with their own eyes while al-‘Askarī was still alive.”¹⁵¹ These companions were al-‘Askarī’s elite followers

147 Al-Mufid, *al-Nukat al-i‘tiqādīyya*, 44–5. On the principle of *lutf*, see al-Murtaḍā, *al-Dhakhīra fī ‘ilm al-kalām*, 186–98; al-Ṭūsī, “Masā’il kalāmiyya,” 98; al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-‘aqa’id*, 135; Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 20, 124–35 passim; Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 44; Halm, *Shī‘ism*, 53.

148 On the Shī‘ī ascription of *iṣma* (divine protection from errancy) to the Imams, see Algar, “Čahārdah Ma‘ṣūm,” *EIr*, 4:627–9.

149 On this work, see Kadhim, “Politics and Theology,” 78–80, though his comment that the book was written in 410/1019–20 should be corrected. For general comments about al-Mufid’s thought regarding the *ghayba*, see McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaykh al-Mufid* (d. 413/1022), 127–31; Bayhom-Daou, *Shaykh al-Mufid*, 77–81. According to McDermott, *The Theology*, 35 (no. 90), 36 (no. 108), al-Mufid is said to have composed two other works on the occultation: *Kitāb al-Ghayba* and *Kitāb Mukhtaṣar fī l-ghayba*, neither of which have survived.

150 Al-Mufid, *al-Masā’il al-‘ashar fī l-ghayba*, 32.

151 [= *jinā’a min aṣḥāb Abī Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad qad shāhadū kha-*

(*khāṣṣatahu*). After al-‘Askarī’s death, these same elite companions became “the intermediaries (*al-wasā’iṭ*) between [the Hidden Imam] and his Shī‘a during his *ghayba*.” Al-Mufid maintains that the mere fact “that [the Hidden Imam] was seen [by these companions] disproves the enemy who claims, ‘The leader [of the Shī‘a] has not been seen or encountered since his alleged birth.’” But what happened after these companions died? Al-Mufid 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 that affirm that the eagerly awaited Qā’im will have two *ghaybas*: one longer than the other. [These hadiths state that] the elite [of his followers] have information about him (*ya’rif khabarahu al-khāṣṣū*) during the shorter (*ghayba*), but the only people who know his location during the longer (*ghayba*) are those from among his most trustworthy and intimate friends/initiates who have been entrusted with the task of serving him (*man tawallā khidmatahu min thuqāt awliyā’ihi*) and who do nothing else but tend to his [daily] needs (*lam yanqaṭi’ anhu ilā l-ishtighāl bi-ghayrihi*).¹⁵²

Al-Mufid appears to be alluding here to what I have called Hadith 2 and Hadith 3 in the previous chapter. According to his reading of the Shī‘ī hadith, not even the elite followers of the Hidden Imam, which presumably includes the ulama, can see him during the second *ghayba*. Only a very select group of the Imam’s friends who are in fact his servants charged with tending to his personal needs are capable of seeing him.

In other late works in which he responds to this question, al-Mufid is far from charitable toward his fellow Shī‘a. A Mu‘tazilī scholar once asked him the same question he had posed to other Shī‘ī ulama from Khurasan to Fars, and for which he never received a satisfactory answer: “Does [the Hidden Imam] fear

lafahu fi ḥayātihī] It bears noting that in this sentence, al-Mufid uses the verb *shāhada*. The verbal-noun (*maṣdar*) of this verb is *al-mushāhada*, the same word used in the following sentence of the final *tawqī’*: “[Before I reappear], some [or someone] will come to my followers claiming to have seen [me] [*al-mushāhada*] with their own eyes.” Although al-Mufid does not cite the final *tawqī’* in any of his extant works, it stands to reason that, having been a student of al-Ṣadūq, he had access to al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn* and possessed knowledge of the final *tawqī’*.

¹⁵² Al-Mufid, *al-Masā’il al-‘ashar fi l-ghayba*, 76. On the function of servants and messengers in the household of the Hidden Imam in the early *ghayba* sources, see Hayes, “The Envoys,” 159–60, 163, 188, 239.

you in the same way that he fears his enemies?¹⁵³ Or does he fear his enemies only?" In other words, the Mu'tazilī scholar was at least willing to understand the rationale that the Imam was forced to conceal himself out of fear of his enemies, but why did he not appear to his believers, especially at a time (in the context of Buyid rule) when they enjoyed liberties and freedoms unheard of before the *ghaybas* commenced? Al-Mufid responds that the Imam is in fact fearful not only of his enemies and those who do not know him, but also of his Shī'a. That he distrusts his enemies is self-evident, but the Imam cautiously evades those who do not 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 Shī'a because none of the Shī'a are perfect, that is, none of the Imam's followers are incapable of making a mistake.¹⁵⁴ If the Imam were to show himself to them¹⁵⁵ and they saw him or they somehow learned his whereabouts,¹⁵⁶ they might be tempted by Satan to reveal this to the authorities, in their desire for the transitory things of this world¹⁵⁷ as was so often the case with the followers of previous prophets who apostatized (here, he gives the example of the followers of Moses who abandoned him and Aaron and followed al-Sāmarī (Quran 20:85–97)).¹⁵⁸ Or a follower may unintentionally (*alā 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.¹⁵⁹

In lieu of seeing the Imam, al-Mufid argues that if differences arise among the Shī'a or they have questions about matters of belief, they must seek the help of the Shī'ī ulama and jurists (*fuqahā'*), and if they are not able to find answers to their questions in the hadiths, they may use reason as a source for deriving laws.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the ulama and *fuqahā'* are at once the Imam's *locum tenentes* and conduits for religious guidance to the faithful.¹⁶¹ However, their authority is not based on seeing the Imam or knowing his whereabouts.

153 [= *hal huwa taqīyya minkum kamā huwa fī taqīyya min a'dā'ihī*]

154 [= *laysū bi-ma'šūmīn min al-ghalat*]

155 [= *law zahara lahum al-imām*]

156 [= *aw 'arafū makānuhu*]

157 [= *tam'an fī l-'ājila wa-raqhbatan fihā*] Cf. Quran 17:18, 76:27.

158 Al-Murtaḍā[al-Mufid], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 110–1. This is discussed, in part, in Kohlberg, "Taqīyya in Shī'ī Theology and Religion," 350. See also Bayhom-Daou, *Shaykh al-Mufid*, 80.

159 [= *li-l-tajammul wa-l-tasharruf bi-ma'rīfatihī bi-l-mushāhada*] Al-Murtaḍā[al-Mufid], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 115.

160 Al-Mufid, *Iddat rasā'il*, 386–7 (from *al-Risāla al-thāniya fī l-ghayba*).

161 Rasekh, "Struggling with Political Limitations," argues that al-Mufid did not intend to arrogate political authority, only juristic authority.

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

6 Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and His Students

When al-Mufid died in 413/1022, the mantle of religious authority among the Shī‘ī scholars in Baghdad was passed to his student al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044).¹⁶² A prodigious man of letters known as ‘Alam al-Hudā (“the banner of [divine] guidance”), al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā was the doyen of the renowned Shī‘ī ulama of the Buyid period and the “undisputed head of the Imāmī community after the death” of al-Mufid.¹⁶³ With him, the anti-traditionist, rationalist, and Mu‘tazilī-leaning orientation of the Shī‘ī ulama of Baghdad which al-Mufid had revived reached its peak.¹⁶⁴ However, unlike his teacher al-Mufid who maintained that reason alone without the aid of inspired tradition (that is, the *aḥādīth* of the *ahl al-bayt*) was insufficient to attain knowledge, al-Murtaḍā affirmed, in agreement with the Mu‘tazila, that the core principles and doctrines of faith could be established and defended by reason.¹⁶⁵

Al-Murtaḍā’s views on the Hidden Imam are expressed in several books and treatises.¹⁶⁶ It is important to note that al-Murtaḍā seldom cites from the

162 On al-Murtaḍā, see Abdulsater, *Shī‘ī Doctrine*; Brockelmann, “al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā,” *EI*², 7:634; Madelung, “‘Alam-al-Hodā,” *Elr*, 1:791–5; Momen, *An Introduction to Shī‘ī Islam*, 311; Halm, *Shī‘ism*, 51; Yūnus, *Taṭawwur al-fikr*, 131–7; Akhtar, *Early Shī‘ite Imāmīyyah Thinkers*, 177–204; Stewart, “Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā,” 167–210; “Traditionalist Spirits and Rationalist Bodies,” 18–23.

163 Madelung, “A Treatise,” 21.

164 On the attempts of the rationalist scholars in Baghdad “to modulate the radicalism” of the traditionist school of Qum, see Ansari and Schmidtke, “The Shī‘ī Reception of Mu‘tazilism (11): Twelver Shī‘īs,” 200–4; Lawson, “Hermeneutics,” *Elr*, 12:235–9.

165 Madelung, “‘Alam-al-Hodā,” *Elr*, 1:793; Madelung, “Imamism and Mu‘tazilite Theology,” 25–8. On the differences between al-Mufid and al-Murtaḍā’s legal approaches, see Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shī‘ī Law*, 42 n. 8.

166 Cf. the late sixth-/twelfth- or early seventh-/thirteenth-century anonymous Shī‘ī-Mu‘tazilī theological treatise, *Khulāṣat al-naẓar*, which offers a similar response focusing on the principle of *lutf* (divine grace) but does *not* hint at the possibility of the Hidden Imam

hadiths introduced in chapters 1 and 2 of this book. Scholars have documented his decision to largely censure al-Kulaynī, al-Nu‘mānī, and to a lesser extent al-Ṣadūq, for filling their books with “forged” hadiths averse to reason.¹⁶⁷

Like al-Mufid, al-Murtaḍā’s speculations about the *ghayba* begin with the premise of the imamate. If a person becomes convinced of the necessity of the imamate, then the doctrine of the Imam’s *ghayba* is easy to grasp.¹⁶⁸ In his works, al-Murtaḍā officially sanctions reports stating that the Imam made incognito visits to his followers or granted audiences to some of his believers during the Lesser Occultation. Al-Murtaḍā states that the Imam used to appear to his adherents at the beginning of his *ghayba*; he only hid himself from his enemies. It was later (that is, after the end of the Lesser Occultation), when danger to his life increased, that he hides himself from both his followers and his opponents. According to al-Murtaḍā,

The Imam hides from his enemies because he must protect himself from them (*li-l-taqiyya minhum*) and he hides from his closest friends (*awli-yā’ihī*) because he fears for them (*li-l-taqiyya ‘alayhim*) ... for if he were to appear to those who affirm his imamate or is 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.¹⁶⁹

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 ‘anhu*

appearing to his most elite disciples during the Greater Occultation. Schmidtke and Ansari (eds.), *Khulāṣat al-naẓar*, 171–8, esp. 176.

167 Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin* 32 [= Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide* (trans. Streight), 13]; Kohlberg, “Kolayni,” *Elr* (online); Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shī‘ī Law*, 41: “[Al-Murtaḍā] 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.”

168 For discussions of al-Murtaḍā’s teachings on the *ghayba*, see Abdulsater, *Shī‘ī Doctrine*, 169–72; Kadhim, “Politics and Theology,” 173–6. For his thought about the imamate, see Mohaghegh, “Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā,” 123–31.

169 I have not been able to locate this passage in any of al-Murtaḍā’s extant writings, but al-Ṭabrisī (on whom, see chapter 4) quotes him thus in his *l’lām 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, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:1033. The translation here is from Kohlberg, “Taqiyya in Shī‘ī Theology and Religion,” 350, which I have revised slightly after consulting the original Arabic text in *l’lām al-warā*.

al-taqīyya) [lit., when fear vanishes from him], adding ominously that "[the Imam] is constantly watching us (*shāhid lanā*) and knows everything about us; nothing about our state and condition is hidden from him (*wa-ghayr khāfin 'alayhi shay' un min aḥwālīnā*)."¹⁷⁰

Using dialectical arguments, in his *Mas'ala wajīza fī l-ghayba*, al-Murtaḍā asserts that indeed, the possibility that the Imam appears in person to some of his friends cannot be ruled out:

If it is said, "What is the difference between [saying that the Imam] exists or does not exist when he is concealed (*ghā'ib*) and no one can reach him or benefit from him (*lā yaṣil ilayhi aḥad wa-lā yantafi' bihi bashar*)," ... then it should be said [to those making such objections], "First, we consider it allowable (*nujawwiz*) that many of his closest friends (*awliyā'ihī*) and those who profess his imamate can reach him, and thus benefit from him."¹⁷¹

Al-Murtaḍā then maintains that the Shī'a who do not meet the Imam (*lā yalqāhu*) still benefit from his existence because they hesitate to commit reprehensible acts (*qabā'ihī*) out of fear of being chastised or reprimanded by the Imam.¹⁷²

Al-Murtaḍā's *al-Shāfi fī l-Imāma* is a rebuttal of the work on the imamate written by his teacher Qāḍī l-Quḍāt 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī (d. 415/1024–5),¹⁷³ a Mu'tazilī theologian who wrote an anti-Shī'ī (or more precisely, anti-Twelve-Shī'ī) polemic and exposition of Mu'tazilī *kalām* entitled the *Kitāb al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*.¹⁷⁴ In his rebuttal, al-Murtaḍā modulates his position and maintains,

170 Al-Murtaḍā, *Rasā'il al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā*, 1:283.

171 Sachedina, "A Treatise on the Occultation," 122, slightly revised after consulting the original text in al-Murtaḍā, "Mas'ala wajīza," 12. Sachedina calls this treatise *Risālat al-ghayba*, but all other sources refer to it as *Mas'ala wajīza fī l-ghayba*. For another translation, see Stewart, "An Eleventh-Century Justification," 486. Al-Murtaḍā makes an almost identical statement in his *al-Dhakhīra fī 'ilm al-kalām*, 423, in an essay about the proofs of the Imam's existence.

172 See also al-Murtaḍā, *Rasā'il al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā*, 3:145. This opinion was also expressed by Maytham al-Bahrānī (d. 699/1299–1300) some three centuries later. See al-Oraibi, "Shī'ī Renaissance," 155–6, and chapter 4 of this book.

173 On 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī, see Madelung, "'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad," *Elr*, 1:116–7; Dhanani, "'Abd al-Jabbār," *ER*, 1:3–5; and Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian*, 41–57.

174 On *Kitāb al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, see Rosenthal, "'Abd al-Jabbār on the Imamate," 207–18. On *al-Shāfi fī l-Imāma*, see Abdulsater, *Shī'ī Doctrine*, 26–7; Zanjānī, "*al-Shāfi fī l-Imāma*," *DMT*, 9:499–502; Akhtar, *Early Shī'ite Imāmiyyah Thinkers*, 187; Ansari and Schmidtke, "Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā's Responses," 257.

We cannot be certain (*lasnā naqṭaʿ*) that the Imam will not appear to some of his closest friends (*awliyāʿ*) and Shīʿa. 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 is not possible for him to know about anyone else (*fa-ammā ḥāl ghayrihi fa-ghayr maʿlūm lahu*).

It is worth noting that al-Murtaḍā's explanation is not the first reason he gives in discussing the rationale for the *ghayba*. It is not even the second. In fact, he concedes that the main reason he mentions this possibility is to respond to ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī's question of why the Imam did not appear to his followers once he no longer faced 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 Shīʿa], or even all of them, we see no reason to mention the rationale preventing his appearance (*al-ʿillā l-mānīʿa min al-ẓuhūr*)."¹⁷⁵

Al-Murtaḍā offers a more reticent view in his *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʿ*.¹⁷⁶ In response to questions about whether there is a difference between the Imam's existence and nonexistence, if 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 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."¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, "the possibility" that the Imam may appear in person to "some of his friends has not been ruled out."¹⁷⁸ He then refers to his earlier argument in *al-Shāfiʿī l-imāma*, in which he emphasizes that it is not possible to be certain about the matter, and that "each of the Imam's Shīʿa can only answer for himself [whether he has seen the Imam or not]. There is no way he can answer for anyone else."¹⁷⁹

175 Al-Murtaḍā, *al-Shāfiʿī fi l-imāma*, 1:149.

176 As the title suggests, the central theme of *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʿ* is the doctrine of *ʿisma*. For general comments about this work, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, 173–9; Abdulsater, *Shiʿi Doctrine*, 27; Anṣārī, *Az Ganjīnahā-yi nusakh-i khaṭṭī*, 31–4; Anṣārī, *Barrasīhā-yi tārikhī*, 477–81.

177 [= *fa-hādhā l-amr ghayr maʿlūm wa-lā sabīl ilā l-qaṭʿ alayhi*] Al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʿ*, 182; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-maʿwā*, 150; al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:855.

178 Al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʿ*, 184; Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya," 528; Kohlberg, "Authoritative Scriptures," 307–8.

179 Al-Murtaḍā, *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʿ*, 184; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-maʿwā*, 151; ʿAlīpūr, *Jibvahā-yi pinhānī-i imām-i ʿaṣr*, 126. The only Western scholar I am aware of who has examined

In these statements, al-Murtaḍā is implying, in subtle terms, that even if someone meets the Imam, it would not be proper 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. In other words, certain believers can see the Imam, but no one should claim this publicly. Why would this be so? Although al-Murtaḍā does not cite the last *tawqīʿ* of the Imam in any of his works, in these statements, it appears that he has the last section of the *tawqīʿ*, where the following warning is found, in mind: “[Before I reappear], some [or someone] will come to my followers 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 impostor.”

The final work in which al-Murtaḍā deals with the question is his *al-Muqniʿ fī l-ghayba*. Although it is not known when *al-Muqniʿ fī l-ghayba* was written, it is certainly one of al-Murtaḍā’s later works, for he refers in it to *al-Shāfiʿī l-imāma* and *Tanzīh al-anbiyāʾ*.¹⁸⁰ 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.¹⁸⁰ The explanations offered in *al-Muqniʿ fī l-ghayba* were held in high esteem by future generations of scholars; they are cited in part or *in toto* by, among others, al-Ṭūsī in his *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, al-Ṭabrisī in his *Iʿlām al-warāʾ bi-ʾlām al-hudā*, and al-Majlisī in his *Biḥār al-anwār*, and are thus a tribute to al-Murtaḍā’s perceived intellectual prowess vis-à-vis his defense of the doctrine of *ghayba*.

On the question of seeing the Imam, al-Murtaḍā again poses the hypothetical question mentioned earlier: What is the difference between saying that the Imam exists or does not exist 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 yuqtaʿ*) that no one reaches the Imam or encounters him because this matter is hidden from us (*hādhā l-amr muḡhayyab ʿannā*) and steeped in uncertainty.”¹⁸¹ 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 (alluding here to al-Ṣadūq and al-Mufīd) have already answered this question by arguing that if the Imam appeared to some of his

this text is Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya,” 528: “Al-Murtaḍā maintains that it is not impossible for the Imām to appear before one of his adherents, provided the Imām has complete confidence in him.”

180 The *wazīr* is identified by al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, 22:123.

181 Al-Murtaḍā, *al-Muqniʿ fī l-ghayba*, 55–6.

friends, they might reveal his location to his enemies or be unable to conceal their joy at seeing the Imam. However, al-Murtaḍā does not find this response convincing. Even if there is concern that one or two Shī'a might act unwisely, this does not apply to the overwhelming majority of Shī'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. He addresses the question of how the believers can benefit from the Imam when he is concealed. His response is telling:

Those loyal to the Imām of the Age, his Shī'a 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 (*taklif*); 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.¹⁸²

Thus, al-Murtaḍā argues that whereas it is possible for the Imam to appear to his closest friends (*awliyā'*) in order to admonish, discipline, or educate them, the Imam is never obligated (*ghayr wājib*) to do so, just as the Shī'a are not obligated to search for reasons he does not appear if he chooses not to.¹⁸³ Al-Murtaḍā is essentially arguing here that there is no need to see the Imam. His concealed presence—or perhaps the threat of his reappearance—is enough to preclude the Shī'a from committing heinous acts or failing to fulfill their religious obligations.

While the arguments advanced by al-Murtaḍā do not amount to a reversal on the question of seeing the Imam, they do signify a clear discontinuity. Like al-Nu'mānī, al-Ṣadūq, and al-Mufīd before him, al-Murtaḍā does not mention any accounts of encounters with the Imam during the second *ghayba*. Yet unlike al-Nu'mānī, al-Ṣadūq, and al-Mufīd, 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-Mufīd), al-Murtaḍā argued repeatedly that it is indeed possible for the Imam to appear to his Shī'a, though the question ultimately remains shrouded in uncertainty.

182 Al-Murtaḍā, *al-Muqni' fi l-ghayba*, 74; translation by Kadhim, "Politics and Theology," 176. See also Abdulsater, *Shī'i Doctrine*, 170–1.

183 Al-Murtaḍā, *al-Muqni' fi l-ghayba*, 77.

Al-Murtaḍā’s influence over the next generation of Shī’ī scholars should not be underestimated. Taking advantage of the greater freedoms they experienced under the Buyid rulers, many of his students settled in Iran, parts of Iraq, and the Levant and promulgated Twelver Shī’ī thought. Three of these students left works specifically addressing the question of whether it is possible to see and recognize the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation. I now turn to a discussion of their responses to this question.

6.1 *Al-Karājukī*

Abū l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Karājukī (d. 449/1057) was a jurist, astronomer, medical doctor, and theologian.¹⁸⁴ After studying in Baghdad under al-Mufīd and later al-Murtaḍā, al-Karājukī returned to his home in Tripoli on the Levantine coast, where he taught and served as a jurist. At the time, Tripoli was under Fatimid control and inhabited by many Ismā’īlī scholars. Al-Karājukī’s *Kanz al-fawā’id*, an anthology of his writings that include long passages from the works of his teachers, is considered a major source of Shī’ī theology.¹⁸⁵ The work reflects the intense debates al-Karājukī engaged in with Ismā’īlī scholars, but also with Mu’tazilīs, Ash’arīs, Jews, and Christians.

Two chapters of *Kanz al-fawā’id* are devoted to the Hidden Imam and to a defense of the doctrine of *ghayba*. Al-Karājukī’s argument centers around the principle of self-protection: as was the case with previous prophets and messengers who are said to have disappeared for a time, the Imam was likewise forced into hiding in the face of threats posed by oppressors who sought to kill him.¹⁸⁶ In the chapter on the Hidden Imam, after explaining that the Imam was forced to conceal himself from everyone out of fear for his life, al-Karājukī states: “Despite this, we cannot say with certainty that no one is able to recognize the Imam or reach him. In fact, it may be possible for a group of his closest friends to meet him¹⁸⁷ and conceal their encounter and keep it a secret.”¹⁸⁸

184 On al-Karājukī’s life and works, see al-Karājukī, *Kanz al-fawā’id*, 1:11–25; Stewart, “An Eleventh-Century Justification,” 474–6; Ansari, *L’imamat*, 109–14; Akhtar, *Early Shī’ite Imāmīyyah Thinkers*, 185, 208; Mourad, *Early Islam*, 198. In Western sources his name is often misspelled as “al-Karājiki,” “al-Karājiki,” “al-Karāchaki,” or “al-Karākji.” The correct vocalization appears to be “al-Karājukī,” a *nisba* derived from the name of the town of Karājuk, see al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-‘arūs*, 13:632.

185 On *Kanz al-fawā’id*, see Stewart, “An Eleventh-Century Justification,” 474–91; Kadhim, “Politics and Theology,” 177; Ansari and Schmidtke, “Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī,” 477–8 n. 9.

186 [= *inna al-sabab fi ghaybat al-imām ikhāfa al-zālimīn lahu wa-ṭalabuhum bi-safk damihī*] Al-Karājukī, *Kanz al-fawā’id*, 1:370.

187 [= *qad yajūz an yajtami’ bihi tā’ifa min awliyā’ihī*]

188 [= *tastir ijtimā’ahā bihi wa-tukhfihī*] Al-Karājukī, *Kanz al-fawā’id*, 2:218.

Al-Karājukī also states that since the Imam is in *ghayba*, those seeking guidance (*mustarshidūn*) must find recourse in jurists and legal scholars (*fuqahā'*), pose their questions to them about the *sharī'a*, and seek their legal rulings about what is permissible and impermissible, since the *fuqahā'* are “the intermediaries (*wasā'it*) between the people and the lord of the [final] age and the custodians of the laws of the *sharī'a* of Islam.”¹⁸⁹ He adds that even though the Imam is concealed and the people cannot recognize him (*lā ya'rifūn shakhṣahu*), he is nonetheless among them, he follows their affairs, and he knows of their words, their conduct, and their deeds. Should, God forbid, the *fuqahā'* stray from the truth, God will cause the Imam to appear.¹⁹⁰ That is, as long as the Imam remains in *ghayba*, the believers can rest assured that the *fuqahā'* will not lead the people astray, even if they are unable to be certain of the Imam's opinion on legal matters or receive guidance directly from him.

6.2 *Al-Ḥalabī*

Abū l-Ṣalāh al-Ḥalabī (374–447/984–1055) studied under al-Mufīd, al-Murtaḍā, and al-Ṭūsī in Baghdad and later served as al-Ṭūsī's representative in al-Ḥalabī's native Aleppo. A prominent Shī'ī jurist and theologian, he is referred to as al-Murtaḍā's successor in scholarship.¹⁹¹ 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-kathīrin 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 fact that [the Imam] is hidden is the same as [the Imam] being manifest.”¹⁹²

6.3 *Al-Ṭūsī*

The most eminent of al-Murtaḍā's students was Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 459 or 460/1066–7), known as Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa (“the master (or authority) of

189 Al-Karājukī, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, 2:218.

190 Al-Karājukī, *Kanz al-fawā'id*, 2:219. For an alternate translation of this section of his work, see Stewart, “An Eleventh-Century Justification,” 488–91.

191 On al-Ḥalabī, see Kohlberg, “Ḥalabī, Abu'l-Ṣāleḥ,” *ELR*, 11:580–1; Pakatchi and Umar, “Abū l-Ṣalāh al-Ḥalabī,” *Encyclopaedia Islamica* (online); Bābāyī, “Abū l-Ṣalāh Ḥalabī,” 19–27; Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 130.

192 [= *fa-ghaybabbatuhu 'alā hādihā l-taqdīr ka-zuhūrihi*] Al-Ḥalabī, *Taqrīb al-ma'ārif*, 444. On this work, see al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 4:366 (no. 1096); Ansari and Schmidtke, “Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī,” 477 n. 7.

the sect,” that is, the Twelver Shī‘ī community) or simply al-Shaykh.¹⁹³ A prodigious and prolific scholar, al-Ṭūsī was originally a student of al-Mufid and, upon the latter’s death, became one of the most prominent students of al-Murtaḍā, who entrusted him with the task of condensing his aforementioned *Kitāb al-Shāfi‘ī l-imāma*. The influence al-Ṭūsī exerted on future generations of scholars is evident from the fact that the school of law that he founded dominated Shī‘ī legal scholarship for the next three centuries.

Invoking Mu‘tazilī principles, al-Ṭūsī argued that God cannot be blamed for the Imam’s *ghayba*, as He is incapable of being unjust or committing an ugly act (*qabīḥan*). Likewise, the Imam himself is not responsible, for he is simply abiding by the will of God. Rather, the *ghayba* is a result of (1) the overwhelming number of the Imam’s enemies and (2) the scarcity of his helpers.¹⁹⁴ Al-Ṭūsī furnishes traditional proofs for the long life of the Qā‘im by mentioning that previous prophets lived for as long as three thousand years.¹⁹⁵

Like al-Murtaḍā, al-Ṭūsī is hesitant to permit the possibility of encountering the Hidden Imam during the second *ghayba*. He never affirms this possibility as a matter of doctrine. In his *Talkhīṣ al-shāfi‘ī*,¹⁹⁶ al-Ṭūsī asserts that the Shī‘a are not obliged to believe that the Imam is hidden from all of his closest friends.¹⁹⁷ 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. Suffice it to say that [seeing the Imam] is possible.”¹⁹⁸ Yet in the same work he appears to contradict himself when he states 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 be so excited that they inform their friends. Then the news would reach the Imam’s enemies, who would seek him

193 On al-Ṭūsī, see Amir-Moezzi, “al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan,” *ET*², 10:744; Tihirānī, *Zindigī-nāmih-yi Shaykh Ṭūsī*; Ḥusayn Karīmān, “Shaykh Ṭūsī,” *DMT*, 10:169–72; Marḍiyyih Muḥammad-Zādiḥ, “Shaykh Ṭūsī,” *DMT*, 10:172–6 [the editor of *Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif-i Tashayyu’* notes that, given his importance, two separate articles have been devoted to him]; Yūnus, *Ṭaṭawwur al-fikr*, 137–56; Akhtar, *Early Shī‘ite Imāmīyyah Thinkers*, 205–46; Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shī‘ī Law*, 44–5; Marcinkowski, “Rapprochement and Fealty”; Rāmyār, “Shaykh Ṭūsī”; Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 35–8; Ansari and Schmidtke, “Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī”; Ansari, *L’imamat*, 114–9.

194 [= *kathrat al-‘adū wa-qillat al-nāṣir*]

195 Al-Ṭūsī, “Masā’il kalāmīyya,” 99.

196 On this work, see Rāmyār, “Shaykh Ṭūsī,” 133–6.

197 [= *lā yajib al-qat’ ‘alā istitārihi ‘an jamī‘ awliyā’ihi*] Al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-shāfi‘ī*, 4:222.

198 [= *wa-l-tajwīz fī ḥādthā l-bāb kāfin*] Al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-shāfi‘ī*, 4:217. The same statement is repeated in al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 93.

out and harm him. For this reason, it is more likely that the Imam will remain concealed from everyone.¹⁹⁹

In his *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, completed in 447/1055–6,²⁰⁰ al-Ṭūsī sought to reconcile the approaches of the rationalists and the traditionists by defending the doctrine of occultation through citing hadiths as well as strictly rational arguments. He states that although the enemies of the Hidden Imam prevented him from appearing and guiding the affairs of the world, they are not able to restrain him from appearing to his elite friends, provided he has complete confidence in their obedience to him.²⁰¹ He then speculates, “It is possible for [the Imam] to appear to most of [his friends], but each person can only speak for himself.”²⁰² If the Imam does not appear to someone, it is likely because the believer has been lax in carrying out his religious obligations.²⁰³ In other words, “Whomever the Imam does not appear to must look within himself and mend his ways,²⁰⁴ because God knows if his intention to help the Imam is pure and if he is not distracted from that intention, the Imam will appear to him.”²⁰⁵

Yet al-Ṭūsī, like so many scholars before him, does not appear to mention any accounts of encounters or sightings of the Hidden Imam after the death of the fourth and last emissary, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī.²⁰⁶ The guarded opinion

199 [= *fa-ya’ūd al-amr ilā l-istitār ‘an al-jamī’*] Al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-shāfi*, 1:94.

200 On this work, see Muḥammadī, “*al-Ghayba*,” *DMT*, 12:146–7; Akhtar, *Early Shī‘ite Imāmīyyah Thinkers*, 231; al-Tihānī, *Zindigīnāmih-yi Shaykh Ṭūsī*, 38; Rāmyār, “Shaykh Ṭūsī,” 136.

201 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 98.

202 Lit., “each person only knows his own state” [= *wa-lā ya’lam kull insān illā ḥāl nafsihi*] Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 99. Also cited in Faḍl Allāh, *al-Nazarīyyāt al-kalāmīyya ‘inda al-Ṭūsī*, 231. Persian translation: al-Ṭūsī, *Khūrshīd dar nahān* (trans. Jalālī), 157–8; Dhākīrī, “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 [the Imam] [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, “*Sharḥ jumal al-‘ilm*,” 244–5.

203 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 99; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma’wā*, 151.

204 [= *yanbaghī an yurājī nafsahu wa-yusliḥ sīratahu*]

205 Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Iqtisād al-hādī*, 233. On this work, see Rāmyār, “Shaykh Ṭūsī,” 145; Ansari and Schmidtke, “Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī,” 487.

206 The third chapter of al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba* is entitled “Reports of some of those who saw the lord of the [final] age while not recognizing him, or who recognized him soon after having seen him.” This would have been the appropriate place to mention an account of an encounter with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, but all fifteen of the reports mentioned by al-Ṭūsī in this chapter appear to be from the Lesser Occultation. Mention can also be made here of Ḥusayn al-Ḥalawānī, a student of al-Murtaḍā. Al-Ḥalawānī refers in the section on the Hidden Imam in his book on sayings of the Imams entitled *Nuzhat al-nāẓir wa-tanbīh al-khāṭir*, 147–51, to an encounter with the Imam from the Lesser Occultation; this encounter was said to have taken place in the year 293/906.

proffered by al-Murtaḍā, al-Karājukī, al-Ḥalabī, and al-Ṭūsī must be viewed in light of the pressures they and other contemporary Shīʿī scholars faced from their interlocutors, (the Muʿtazilis 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 more a strategic method of neutralizing the doubts raised by their rationalist interlocutors than a doctrinal judgment. In this light, it is of no minor importance that in his *al-Iʿtiqādāt*, a statement of core Imāmī/Twelve Shīʿī beliefs, al-Ṭūsī chose not to allude or refer to the issue of seeing (or not seeing) the Hidden Imam or adduce any stories of sightings and encounters. In the section of *al-Iʿtiqādāt* on the Hidden 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 (*ḥayy mawjūd*) is that there must be an Imam who is guarded [by God] from error (*maʿṣūm*) at every moment and in every age (*kull ānin wa-zamān*). And thus it is established that he is living and present in each age (*fī kull zamān*).”²⁰⁷

As I 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* after the first *ghayba* (with the exception of (1) the Imam appearing to al-Ṣadūq in a dream and (2) the servants who are with the Imam at all times, according to al-Mufid). None of these scholars ever suggests that it is possible for other Shīʿa, including the ulama, to see the Imam physically in a wakeful state after the first *ghayba*. The most important text that reflects this position is the final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam, in which it is said that anyone who claims to see him before the end of time is a lying impostor.

The door that the *tawqīʿ* purportedly closed was partially opened by al-Mufid, and to a greater extent by al-Murtaḍā and his students, the latter out of intellectual necessity. The *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam created the requisite intellectual space for Shīʿī scholars in the Buyid period to formulate theology and jurisprudence. With the Shīʿī *fuqahāʾ*, ulama, and hadith experts situated as intermediaries between the Hidden Imam and the faithful, there was no longer a need for an unconcealed and manifest Imam. Guarded in their response to their rationalist interlocutors, these scholars moved the issue of contacting and seeing the Hidden Imam from the realm of the impossible to

²⁰⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, “*al-Iʿtiqādāt*,” 107.

the realm of the theoretically possible. Permitting the possibility of encounters with the Imam served both a discursive and an apologetic function. It made an irrational concept slightly more rational in the largely pluralistic and diverse context of fifth-/eleventh-century Baghdad. It also foreshadowed what was to occur over the next two centuries: the earliest stories of contact with the Hidden Imam began to appear, thus signifying a further shift; encounters with the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation would soon no longer simply be a possibility.

From the Youth and the Stone to the Proliferation of Accounts

The tacit approval of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī of the possibility of seeing the Imam foreshadowed the “invention” of a tradition. Over the following two centuries, accounts of encounters and contact, in a wakeful state, with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, albeit rare and infrequent, began to appear in the works of Shīʿī authorities Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī (d. 573/1178), Aḥmad al-Ṭabarsī (d. late sixth/twelfth century), and in particular, Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266) and his student al-Irbilī (d. 692/1292–3 or 693/1293–4).

Until the late fourth/twelfth century, other than al-Ṣadūq’s dream of the Hidden Imam at the Ka’ba (discussed in chapter 3), one other story of an encounter with the Imam during the period after the Lesser Occultation has come to light, though this account cannot be dated with absolute certainty. The encounter described in this account also occurs in a dream and is found in Abū Ja’far Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Āmulī al-Māzandarānī’s (known as al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr; fl. early fifth/early eleventh century)¹ *Dalā’il al-imāma* (The proofs of the imamate), a hagiographical collection of mostly miraculous tales that seek to prove the Imams’ supernatural abilities.² The account in question

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- 1 According to al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī’a*, 8:241, the author’s full name is Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī al-Āmulī al-Māzandarānī. The epithet “al-Ṣaghīr” distinguishes him from an earlier Shīʿī scholar with the same name who lived in the first half of the fourth/tenth century, was a contemporary of al-Kulaynī, and wrote *al-Mustarshad fī l-imāma* (on this work, see chapter 1). Al-Ṭihirānī 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 hadith on the authority of teachers of both of these scholars; however, the publisher of the Qum edition of *Dalā’il al-imāma* argues that al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr belonged to an earlier generation of scholars (that included al-Murtaḍā and al-Murtaḍā’s brother al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1015)) who were also contemporaries of al-Ṭūsī and al-Najāshī. Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā’il al-imāma*, 29–37, esp. 31–2. See also al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Nawādir al-mu’jizāt*, 35–57 (from the publisher’s introduction). Unlike al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr’s *Dalā’il al-imāma*, his *Nawādir al-mu’jizāt* does not appear in Ibn Ṭāwūs’s list of early Shīʿī books and is not mentioned in Kohlberg’s study of Ibn Ṭāwūs.
 - 2 Copies of *Dalā’il al-imāma* that have survived are incomplete. We do not know when *Dalā’il al-imāma* was written but we can infer from internal evidence a *terminus post quem* of 411/1020–1. See al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā’il al-imāma*, 40. Al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī’a*, 8:244 (no. 1018), points out that Ibn Ṭāwūs was the first Shīʿī scholar to cite from this work. On references to *Dalā’il al-imāma* in Ibn Ṭāwūs’s writings, see Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*,

is the last of five reports in a chapter called “Knowledge about the companions [that is, Shi‘a] who saw the lord of the [final] age during the *ghayba* and recognized him.”³ The first four reports mentioned in this chapter all date to the Lesser Occultation. The fifth report appears to describe an episode 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 l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Hārūn b. Mūsā al-Talla‘ukbarī (fl. late fourth/tenth century),⁴ who heard it from a certain Abū l-Ḥusayn b. Abī l-Baghl al-Kātib, about whom nothing is known, during the lifetime of Abū Mansūr al-Ṣāliḥān,⁵ a minister at the court of the Buyid rulers Sharaf al-Dawla (r. 350–79/961–89)⁶ and Bahā’ al-Dawla (r. 379–403/989–1012)⁷ during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Qādir bi-Allāh (r. 381–422/991–1031).

In the account, Abū l-Ḥusayn b. Abī l-Baghl al-Kātib, while fleeing from Abū Mansūr al-Ṣāliḥān, seeks refuge in a cemetery in Baghdad and asked its custodian to lock the gate. During the night, a young man miraculously enters the cemetery without opening the gate and gives him the text of a prayer known as *du‘ā’ al-faraj* (“supplication for the removal of difficulties”)⁸ to recite for divine aid and assistance (*ghawth*). The next day, al-Ṣāliḥān’s men find al-Baghl al-Kātib and assure him that he will not be harmed if he comes with them to meet

140–1, and al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā’il al-imāma*, 42–4. Both *Dalā’il al-imāma* and *Nawādir al-mu’jizat* require further study. One of the topoi encountered in *Dalā’il al-imāma* is peregrinations to mysterious islands and lands controlled by the Imams. For references and discussion, see Ghaemmaghami, “To the Abode of the Hidden One.”

3 Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā’il al-imāma*, 537–53.

4 Little information is known about al-Talla‘ukbarī, though both he and his father are mentioned by al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, 79. Al-Talla‘ukbarī’s name appears in lists of students of al-Ṣadūq. See al-Ṣadūq, *al-Hidāya (fi l-uṣūl wa-l-furū’)*, 97; al-Khū‘ī, *Mu’jam rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 18:336 (no. 11971). Al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī‘a*, 8:242, gives 387/997–8 as his date of death. Al-Talla‘ukbarī compiled a collection of supplications called *Majmū‘ al-da‘awāt*, which was among the sources used by Ibn Ṭāwūs in his *Muhaj al-da‘awāt*. See Ḥā’irī-Qazvīnī, “Majmū‘ al-da‘awāt,” *DMT*, 15:82. For further information on al-Talla‘ukbarī, see also Ansari, *L’imamat*, 76–9.

5 On him, see al-Bāḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 192 n. 3.

6 On him, see Madelung, “Sharaf al-Dawla,” *EI*².

7 On him, see Bosworth, “Bahā’ al-Dawla wa-Ḍiyā’ al-Milla,” *EI*²; Klaus Hachmeier, “Bahā’ al-Dawla,” *EI*³ (online).

8 A supplication with this name is found in many modern Shi‘i devotional texts though in different forms and attributed to more than one Imam. See al-Qummi, *Kulliyāt-i mafātiḥ al-jinnān*, 47–8. Cf. idem, 115–6 (*du‘ā’-i faraj-i ḥaḍrat-i ḥujja*), which is actually a different supplication. See also al-Shīrāzī, *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī*, 281–2. For general information on supplications attributed to various Imams, see Algar, “Do‘ā,” *Elr*, 7:452–6; Amir-Moezzi, “Notes sur la Prière dans le Shi‘isme Imamite”; Turner, “Aspects of Devotional Life.”

al-Šāliḥān, a request to which he readily consents. Al-Šāliḥān tells al-Baghl al-Kātib that on the previous night, the Hidden Imam appeared to him in a dream and commanded him “to do good.” Al-Baghl al-Kātib responds that the Hidden Imam also appeared to him as a young man and informs al-Šāliḥān about the miracle that seemed to occur in the cemetery.⁹

After al-Ṭūsī the next prominent Shīʿī authority was Amīn al-Dīn (or Amīn al-Islām) Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154),¹⁰ author of “probably the most widely used and admired Twelver Imāmī *tafsīr*.”¹¹ Al-Ṭabrisī continued the work of al-Murtaḍā and his students to incorporate the principles of Muʿtazilī *kalām* to defend the doctrine of *ghayba*. And like the scholars before him, al-Ṭabrisī does not mention any accounts of believers who have seen the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation. In fact, in his *Tāj al-mawālīd fī mawālīd al-aʿimma wa-wafayātihim*, he does not address the issue of seeing the Imam during the *ghayba* at all. And the seven accounts he cites in his *Iʿlām al-warāʾ bi-aʿlām al-hudā* in the chapter on sightings of the Hidden Imam are all from the Lesser Occultation.¹²

9 Al-Ṭabarī al-Šaghīr, *Dalāʾil al-imāma*, 551–3 (no. 525); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:304–6 (cited in chapter 15: *mā zahara min muʿjizātihi wa-fīhi baʿḍu aḥwālīhi wa-aḥwāl sufarāʾihī*); al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 1:360–1 (in the chapter on miracles performed by the Hidden Imam); Muʿassasat al-Imām al-Hādī, *al-Buṣhrā*, 65–8, mistakenly provides al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-Ghayba* as the source. Al-Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 418 n. 1, reasons that the person who narrated the account from Abū l-Ḥusayn b. Abī l-Baghl al-Kātib was a contemporary of al-Mufid, and that Abū Maṣṣūr al-Šāliḥān apparently lived in the early period of the Greater Occultation. As a result, al-Gulpāyigānī records the account in the chapter of his work on accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation, though he grants the possibility that the events in the story occurred during the Lesser Occultation. Neither al-Majlisī nor al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdī include the account in their chapters on encounters with the Imam in the Greater Occultation. By contrast, al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqīb* 2:567–9 (account no. 30), translated the story into Persian and included it in the chapter of his book dealing with accounts of contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation. The original account in Arabic is recorded in Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj al-mahmūm*, 245–7 (on this work, see below); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 88:349–51 (no. 11), 92:200–1 (no. 33); al-Bāḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 192–5 (no. 82); al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Mustadrak al-wasāʾil*, 6:308–10; Faqīh, *Liqaʾāt al-ʿulamāʾ*, 147–9; Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i ʿaṣr*, 314–6 (Persian translation). See also al-Hayʿa al-ʿIlmiyya, *Muʿjam aḥādīth al-imām al-mahdī*, 6:349–52, where the account is mentioned as one of the miracles performed by the Hidden Imam after the Lesser Occultation.

10 On him, al-Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām al-warāʾ*, 1:16–28; Hamza, Rizvi, with Mayer (eds.), *An Anthology*, 36–7; Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shīʿī Law*, 45.

11 Hamza, Rizvi, with Mayer (eds.), *An Anthology*, 36. See also Bar-Asher, “Exegesis ii.,” *Elr*, 9:116–9. On al-Ṭabrisī’s famous commentary, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, see Karīmān, *Ṭabarsī wa majmaʿ al-bayān*; Fudge, *Qurʾānic Hermeneutics*.

12 Al-Ṭabrisī, *Iʿlām al-warāʾ*, 2:218–21. In *Tāj al-mawālīd*, al-Ṭabrisī stresses that no one knows

One of Amīn al-Dīn al-Ṭabrisī's grandsons, 'Alī b. Raḍī l-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Amīn al-Dīn al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī (fl. late sixth/twelfth century), compiled a collection of prayers and supplications called *Kunūz al-najāh*,¹³ in which he records a supplication taught by the Hidden Imam in a dream to a certain Abū l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī l-Layth. The encounter took place in the Quraysh cemetery when Abū l-Ḥasan had fled to the cemetery out of fear of being killed.¹⁴ The story of this supplication bears a strong, if not uncanny, resemblance to the above-mentioned story from al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr's *Dalā'il al-imāma* and may in

when the *ghayba* will end and anyone who appoints a time for the Imam's appearance is a liar. Al-Ṭabrisī, *Tāj al-mawālid*, 13. In the same work, he weighs in on a question that later became a source of great contention: does the Hidden Imam have wives and children and if so, are their lives also prolonged? Al-Ṭabrisī states that according to the hadiths of the Imams, it is not prohibited (*ghayr mumtani'*) for the Hidden Imam to have children and a family, and he is also permitted (*jā'iz*) to have a family during the period of his rule (*ayyām dawlatihī*) after he appears from hiding, though al-Ṭabrisī ultimately concludes that no one can answer this question with certainty. Al-Ṭabrisī, *Tāj al-mawālid*, 116–7. Later, in stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam that were 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 Ghaemmaghami, "To the Abode of the Hidden One." Al-Ṭabrisī's *I'lām al-warā* (completed between 511/1117 and 534/1140) is a biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, Fāṭima, and the twelve Imams, while the shorter *Tāj al-mawālid* (completed in 509/1115–6) is considered an abridgement of *I'lām al-warā*, even though it was completed earlier.

- 13 This work has never been published, and I do not know of any extant manuscripts in North America. Amir-Moezzi consulted a manuscript identified by him as "s.l. [Iran], 1318/1900" in his "Contribution à la Typologie," 128 n. 68. Al-Ṭihri, *al-Dharī'a*, 18:175–6, states that this work was compiled by Amīn al-Dīn al-Ṭabrisī's son, but adds that Ibn Ṭāwūs said explicitly in his *Muhaj al-da'awāt* (on this work and its author, see below) that the author is al-Ṭabrisī senior. On *Kunūz al-najāh*, see also Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 233–4 (no. 320).
- 14 Amir-Moezzi found this supplication in the above-mentioned manuscript of the *Kunūz al-najāh*, 46–7. Amir-Moezzi, "Contribution à la Typologie," 128 (Récit de Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī l-Layth (VI/XII siècle)). The earliest work which refers to this account is al-Mashhadī (d. 610/1213–4), *al-Mazār al-kabīr*, 591. Al-Mashhadī includes the account in the section of his work on supplications to recite as one is entering the underground cellar (*sirdāb*) in Samarra. He does not mention the source, saying only that the prayer was narrated on the authority of the Imam. The account is also mentioned in al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:554 (no. 24), citing an unidentified manuscript of *Kunūz al-najāh* as his source; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, 94–5 (here, as opposed to *Najm-i thāqib*, al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī does not mention that the supplication was taught to Abū l-Layth in a dream); al-Ḥā'iri al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 2:44 (no. 28) (citing al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī's *Jannat al-ma'wā* as his source); al-Qummī, *Kullīyyāt-i mafātīḥ al-jinān*, 45–6 (where three words not found in earlier versions are added to the end of the supplication), 531–2 [for a similar supplication, cf. al-Qummī, *Kullīyyāt-i mafātīḥ al-jinān*, 115–6]; Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 519–20 (no. 2); Mu'assasat al-Imām al-Hādī, *al-Bushrā*, 70–1.

fact be a copy or the sign of an emerging trope, though the supplication taught by the Imam to Abū l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī l-Layth in his dream is different from the *Du'ā' al-faraj* taught to al-Baghl al-Kātib.¹⁵

1 The Earliest Accounts of Encounters with the Imam in a Wakeful State

The story of the youth and the Black Stone of the Ka'ba is the earliest account of a physical encounter with the Hidden Imam in a wakeful state that can be placed, definitively, in the Greater Occultation. The story is recorded in the chapter on the miracles of the Hidden Imam in Qoṭb al-Dīn Sa'īd b. Hibat Allāh al-Rāwandī's¹⁶ (d. 573/1178) *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'ih*, also known as *Kitāb al-mu'jizāt*.¹⁷ Like al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr's *Dalā'il al-imāma*, *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'ih* is a collection of miracles attributed to Muḥammad and the Imams. The title refers to the supernatural acts that are said to have proceeded from (*kharaja*) or been achieved (*jaraha*; cf. Quran 6:60) by these figures as proof of their stations. Al-Rāwandī also compiled a collection of tales about the prophets called *Qaṣaṣ* (or *Qiṣaṣ*) *al-anbiyā'* which contains a short chapter on the Hidden Imam, though in this chapter he does not broach the issue of contact with the Imam other than to cite stories about the miraculous nature of his birth.¹⁸

The story of the youth and the Black Stone is narrated on the authority of the Shī'ī traditionist and jurist Abū l-Qāsim Ja'far b. Muḥammad b. Qūlawayh (d. 368/978–9 or 369/979–80), a disciple of al-Kulaynī and a teacher of al-Mufid.¹⁹ Al-Rāwandī does not mention the final *tawqī'* of the Hidden Imam in this work and makes no attempt to reconcile this account with the “lying impostor” assertion of the *tawqī'*.

15 A contemporary of Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī, Warrām Abī Farrās al-Ashtarī (d. 605/1208–9) mentions another account of an encounter with the Hidden Imam in which the Imam miraculously caused a spring of water to appear inside a mosque and later appeared to an individual on his deathbed. Al-Ashtarī, *Tanbih al-khawāṭir wa-nuzhat al-nawāzīr al-ma'rūf bi-majmū'at Warrām*, 2:303–5.

16 On him, see Kohlberg, “Rāvandi, Qoṭb-al-Din Sa'īd,” *EIr* (online); Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shī'ī Law*, 45; Ansari and Schmidtke, “The Shī'ī Reception of Mu'tazilism (11): Twelver Shī'īs,” 207.

17 On this work, see Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 215 (no. 260). Anṣārī, *Az Ganjīnah-yi nusakh-i khattī*, 75, introduces the oldest known manuscript.

18 For a summary of some of these tales, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 265–9; Pierce, *Twelve Infallible Men*, 136–8.

19 On him, see McDermott, “Ebn Qūlawayh, Abu'l-Qāsem Ja'far,” *EIr*, 8:47; Ansari, *L'imamat*, 62–4.

In this story, according to Ibn Qūlawayh, after the Black Stone of the Kaʿba was returned by the Ismāʿīlī Qarāmiṭa in 339/950–1,²⁰ that is, some eight years after the passing of al-Samurī, the fourth and final emissary, and the start of the Second or Greater Occultation, no one was capable of setting it back in its place. Suddenly, Ibn Qūlawayh witnesses a handsome, brown-skinned youth²¹ appear, and in a spectacular feat of bravery, miraculously yet quietly set the Black Stone in the corner of the Kaʿba that houses the Black Stone in a vivid typological refiguration of the famous account mentioned in the biography (*sīra*) of the Prophet Muḥammad in which, while still a youth in Mecca, Muḥammad set the same Black Stone in its place.²² Phantom-like, the mysterious young man disappears as suddenly as he had appeared. Since Shīʿī lore maintains that only a Prophet or Imam can set the Black Stone in its place,²³ the narrator concludes that the comely, brown-skinned youth was the Hidden Imam.²⁴

- 20 Al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 201, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:58, and other later authorities give the year as 337/948–9, but older sources state that in 339/951 the Qarāmiṭa returned the Black Stone they had stolen in 317/930. See, for example, Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232–3), *al-Kāmil fī l-tārīkh*, 8:486. The discrepancy between 337 and 339 is perhaps due to the similarity between the shape of the numbers 7 (*sabʿ*) and 9 (*tisʿ*) when handwritten. 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 in the end of the era of the *sharīʿa* if not the end of the Islamic dispensation altogether, a central Qarmaṭī objective. See Hajnal, “Some Aspects,” 235. For a detailed study of the theft and return of the Black Stone, see Halm, *The Empire of the Mahdī*, 250–64, 380–5. See also Madelung, “The Fatimids,” 21, 37–9; Wensinck and J. Jomier, “Kaʿba,” *EI*²; Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism,” 272.
- 21 According to some Shīʿī hadiths, God preserves the Qāʾim in the form of a young man throughout his *ghayba*, and the Qāʾim will appear “as a robust youth in the form/body of someone who is in his early thirties at the time of his *zuhūr*” (*annahū yakūn ʿind zuhūrihi shābban qawīyyan fī šūrāt ibn nayyif wa-thalāthīn sana*). Al-Murtaḍā[ʿ]/al-Mufīd], *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra*, 319. See also al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, 189; al-Nīlī, *Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍrāʿa*, 319–22; al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 2:311–4; Gulpāyīgānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 284–5. For a discussion of the theme of the Imam as a youth, see al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 112; Amīnī, “Kitāb-i ghaybat-i Shaykh Ṭūsī,” 483; Modarressī, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 95–6. In stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam, the Imam often appears as a youth iridescent in beauty. See Ghaemmaghami, “Numinous Vision,” esp. 56–8.
- 22 [Ibn Ishāq], *The Life of Muḥammad* (trans. Guillaume), 86; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, 4:217 (no. 3).
- 23 According to Muḥammad al-Ṣadr, *Tārīkh 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., ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (d. 95/713), the fourth Imam) have placed the Black Stone in its place.
- 24 Al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾih*, 1:475–8 (no. 18). Also cited in al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:999–1000; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:58–9 (no. 41); al-Bāḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 201–3 (no. 85); al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-maʿājiz*, 8:154–6; al-ʿAmīlī al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḍiyāʾ al-*

It merits noting that the Black Stone has a close association with the Qā'im in an early Shī'ī hadith. It is said that when the Qā'im appears, Gabriel will descend to earth in the form of a bird, become the first creature to pledge allegiance to the Qā'im at the Black Stone, guide others unto the Qā'im, and bear witness to those who enter the Qā'im's presence at the corner of the Ka'ba that houses the Black Stone in order to pledge their allegiance and loyalty to him, in a mythic reenactment of the primordial covenant.²⁵ Another hadith states that Gabriel will appear at the time of the Imam's appearance (*zuhūr*) in the form of a giant white bird, an image that perhaps is meant to conjure the image of the giant cosmic, white rooster that serves as the Prophet's friend and in many hadiths stands before the Throne of God.²⁶

Questions exist about the provenance of the story of the youth and the Black Stone. Of the twenty-five works attributed to Ibn Qūlawayh, only his *Kāmil al-ziyārāt* (or *Kamāl al-ziyāra*), one of the earliest extant works on the rewards

ālamūn, 4:105–6; al-Hā'irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 1:346–7; al-Iṣfahānī, *Mūkyāl al-makārim*, 1:166–7 (no. 426); al-Shāhrūdī, *al-Imām al-mahdī*, 141–2; al-Ṣaffār al-Najafī, *Mawsū'at al-imām*, 3:116–8; Āshūr, *Mawsū'at ahl al-bayt*, 19:65; al-Baḥrānī and al-Marzūq, *Mawsū'at al-qīṣaṣ*, 546–8; Mu'assasat al-Imām al-Hādī, *al-Buṣhrā*, 64–5. For Persian translations, see Ardabīlī (attrib.), *Ḥadīqat al-shī'a*, 2:970–1; Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 625–7; al-Majlisī, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 338–9; al-Maythamī al-'Irāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 312–4 (no. 19), who records the account in the chapter of his work on accounts of those who saw the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation or close to it; al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:674–5 (account no. 53), who records the account in the chapter of his work on accounts of those who met the Imam during the Greater Occultation; Nūrī-Ṭabarsī², *Kifāyat al-muwahhīdīn*, 2:815–6; al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd* (trans. Davānī), 796–8, where the translator mistakenly records the date of the account as 307/919–20; Tūnihī, *Maw'ūdnāmih*, 271–2. A partial English translation is found in Dewjī, *Imame Zaman Hazrat Mehdi* (trans. Lakha), 133–4. Nūrī-Ṭabarsī², *Kifāyat al-muwahhīdīn*, 2:854, contends that the Qarāmiṭā's theft of the Black Stone and destruction of the Ka'ba fulfilled one of the portents of the Imam's reappearance.

25 Al-Ṣadūq, *Ilal al-sharā'ī*, 2:429–30; al-Ḥillī (d. after 802/1399–1400), *Mukhtaṣar baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, 490–1 (no. 585). See also al-Ṣadūq, *Ilal al-sharā'ī*, 2:423–4 (no. 5); al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar baṣā'ir al-darajāt*, 488 (no. 583); al-Majlisī, *Rawḍat al-muttaqīn*, 4:6; al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī, *Tafṣīl wasā'il al-Shī'a*, 13:319 (no. 17840). According to a hagiographical account first mentioned in al-Rāwandī's *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'ih*, green angels descended to earth on the night of the Hidden Imam's birth and instructed al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī to protect the infant. Al-'Askarī identified one of the birds as Gabriel. Al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'ih*, 1:456. Also cited in al-Baḥrānī, *Madīnat al-mā'ājiz*, 8:33; al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, 2:67.

26 See Tottoli, "At Cock-Crow"; Omidsalar, "Cock. ii. In Persian Literature and Folklore," *Elr*, 5:878–82. It is said that the rooster 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-Naḥl: "The *amr* of God cometh; so seek not to hasten it" (Quran 16:1). Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 608 (no. 18); al-Aḥsā'i, *Kitāb al-Raj'a*, 94. As mentioned in chapter 1, the *amr* of God is often defined in Shī'ī sources as the Qā'im and/or the Qā'im's *amr* or *qiyām*.

bestowed on those who visit the tombs of the Prophet and the Imams, has survived.²⁷ 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 ulama and historians prior to al-Rāwandī (including Ibn Qūlawayh's students, such as al-Mufīd) do not mention, allude or refer to this account. There are also no references to the mysterious youth and his role in setting the Black Stone in its place, in the extant historical accounts of the return of the Black Stone. Since al-Rāwandī does not provide a formal *isnād* (he only says that he is narrating the account on the authority of Ibn Qūlawayh), it is not possible to determine his source for the account.

In the same period, a contemporary of al-Rāwandī, Abū Maṣṣūr Aḥmad al-Ṭabarsī (d. late sixth/twelfth century; not to be mistaken with his more famous contemporary, the aforementioned Quran exegete Amīn al-Dīn al-Ṭabrisī)²⁸ claimed in his anti-Sunnī polemical work *al-Iḥtijāj 'alā ahl al-lajāj*²⁹ that some two centuries earlier, al-Mufīd had been in contact with the Hidden Imam. By way of evidence, he furnished two short letters from the Imam addressed to al-Mufīd, but without a chain of transmission. In an attempt to prove the Hidden Imam's existence to the opponents of the Shī'ā, and to demonstrate that he directly communicates with some of the Shī'ī ulama, al-Ṭabarsī alleged that al-Mufīd received these letters from *al-nāḥiya al-muqaddasa* ("the sacred region")³⁰ of the Hidden Imam in the year 410/1019. He thus drew clear parallels

27 McDermott, "Ebn Qūlawayh, Abu'l-Qāsem Ja'far," *Elr*, 8:47. On *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, see al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 17:255 (no. 139); Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 211 (no. 253); Nakash, "The Visitation of the Shrines," 155.

28 On him, see Kohlberg, "al-Ṭabarsī (al-Ṭabrisī)," *ET*², 10:39; Ḥusayn Karīmān, "Ṭabarsī, Abū Maṣṣūr Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib," *DMT*, 10:472–3. Almost nothing is known about the life of this scholar and thus Kohlberg's ambiguity about the correct transliteration of his *nisba* is understandable. If he was born in the village of Ṭabris (the Arabicized form of Tafrish) between Kāshān and Iṣfahān, then his *nisba* is al-Ṭabrisī. If, however, he was born in the northern Iranian region of Tabaristan (Tapuria), his *nisba* would be al-Ṭabarsī. On this problem, see the first paragraph of Kohlberg, "al-Ṭabrisī (Ṭabarsī), Amīn al-Dīn," *ET*², 10:40. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, "Contribution à la Typologie," 113 n. 8. Since he is buried in a shrine near Bārfurūsh in Tabaristan, it would be safe to presume that the correct vocalization of his name is, in fact, al-Ṭabarsī. Halm, *Shī'ism*, 60, gives his date of death as 599/1202, though he does not provide a source.

29 On this work, see Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 187–8 (no. 187). Kohlberg points out elsewhere that this work was very popular in the Safavid period, when it was twice translated into Persian, likely because of its anti-Sunnī and polemical tone, Kohlberg, "al-Ṭabarsī (al-Ṭabrisī)," *ET*², 10:39.

30 As pointed out by Kohlberg and Hayes, the enigmatic term *al-nāḥiya* is used in sources from the Lesser Occultation as a cypher for the institutions that represented the Hidden Imam or at times for the threshold or location of the Imam. See Kohlberg, "Ṭaqiyya in Shī'ī

to the *tawqīāt* furnished by the emissaries and agents of the Imam during the Lesser Occultation.³¹ However, al-Ṭabarsī does not identify his sources nor does he provide an *isnād* for this or any of the other reports or hadiths he cites (with the exception of the *tafsīr* ascribed to al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, discussed in chapter 1). In the introduction to his work, he states that he sees no need to cite *asānīd* for the reports and hadiths he records because, in his words, there is consensus (*ijmāʿ*) and agreement about their authenticity.³²

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 Zayn al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192; a student of al-Rāwandī, al-Ṭabrisī, and al-Ṭabarsī, and called “the most illustrious Imami scholar of the 12th century”³³) claimed that the epithet “al-Mufid” was given to him by the Hidden Imam.³⁴

Theology and Religion,” 348; Hayes, “The Envoys,” 150–2, who notes that whereas *al-nāḥiya* is used in sources from the Lesser Occultation, *al-nāḥiya al-muqaddasa* appears in later sources.

- 31 Al-Ṭabarsī, *al-Ihtijāj*, 2:495–9; al-Shīrāzī, *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī*, 136–50. The two letters were translated into Persian by al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī in the chapter of his *Najm-i thāqib* on contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation. Al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:660–5 (account no. 50), 2:666–72 (account no. 51). Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī mentions a report cited by Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772) saying that al-Mufid received three letters, one of which has not survived. Al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:670. The theory of the three letters gained popularity and is alluded to in many biographical entries about al-Mufid. See, for example, al-Mufid, *Awāʾil al-maqālāt, pānzdah* (of the editorial introduction). Madelung, “Mufid, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad,” *ET*², was the first Western scholar to take notice of the two letters, though he neglects to point out that they are not cited in any works prior to al-Ṭabarsī and are almost certainly of later origin.
- 32 Al-Ṭabarsī, *al-Ihtijāj*, 1:14.
- 33 Amir-Moezzi, “Ebn Šahrāshūb,” *Elr*, 8:53–4; Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shīʿī Law*, 45; Pierce, “Ibn Shahrashub.” Ibn Shahrāshūb’s *Manāqib ʿal Abī Ṭālib* originally had a chapter on the Hidden Imam that may have included some accounts of encounters with the Imam but it has not survived. See Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 251, and Amir-Moezzi, “Ebn Šahrāshūb,” *Elr*, 8:53–4, who notes that the section on the Hidden Imam is missing from every accessible surviving copy, including a manuscript dated 777/1375–6. However, it is 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, *Mathālib al-nawāṣib* (published in Baghdad; on manuscripts, see al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, 19:76 (no. 409)); Amir-Moezzi, “Ebn Šahrāshūb,” *Elr*, 8:53–4) is an anti-Sunni polemic and does not contain any accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam.
- 34 [= *wa-laqqabahu bi-l-shaykh al-mufid ṣāhibu al-zamān*] Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Maʿālim al-ʿulamāʾ* (a biblio-biographical lexicon of prominent Shīʿī scholars that combines features of *rijāl* and *fihrist* works), 148. Ibn Shahrāshūb adds that he provides additional informa-

This point has been challenged by the prominent twentieth-century “Grand Ayatollah” Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū‘ī (d. 1992).³⁵

Moreover, none of the works written by al-Mufid, his prolific students (e.g., al-Murtaḍā, al-Ṭūsī, al-Najāshī, al-Karājukī, Abū Ya‘lā al-Ja‘farī), or anyone else prior to al-Ṭabarsī mentions or alludes to these letters. Later generations of ulama cite these letters without questioning them; one scholar from the late nineteenth century even claimed that all of the ulama accept them.³⁶ However, a number of modern scholars have cast doubts on their veracity. Baḥr al-‘Ulūm al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī (d. 1212/1797), whose numerous stories of encounters with the Imam circulate (see 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 Occultation.”³⁷ Baḥr al-‘Ulūm al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī is almost certainly alluding here to the final *tawqī‘* of the Hidden Imam and the

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- tion about how al-Mufid received this epithet from the Hidden Imam in his *Manāqib al-Abī Ṭālib*. This was 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 Shūshṭarī, *Majālis al-mu‘minīn*, 477. Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī mentions this report as an example of an encounter with the Hidden Imam, al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma‘wā*, 73 (account no. 25); al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:673 (account no. 52). Also cited in al-Ḥalawājī, *al-Qiṣaṣ al-bāhira*, 243; al-Shīrāzī, *Mīn karāmāt al-awliyā’*, 260–1. On *Ma‘ālim al-‘ulamā’*, see Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 236–7 (no. 326).
- 35 Al-Khū‘ī, *Mu‘jam rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 18:220, points out that al-Mufid was called al-Mufid by his contemporaries al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār and the Arab linguist ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā al-Rummānī (d. 384/994) well before the letters he was said to have received from the Hidden Imam. Al-Mufid’s student al-Ṭūsī refers to his teacher as al-Shaykh al-Mufid. See e.g., al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 104, 128, 129, 150, and passim; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, 3 and passim. However, al-Ṭūsī never suggests that this name was given to al-Mufid by the Hidden Imam. Some modern-day scholars continue to cite the letters to support al-Mufid’s authority and unique station in the eyes of the Imam. See, for example, Sa‘īd, *Saqīfat al-ghayba*, 249–51.
- 36 See al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:671. Among the scholars who have accepted them are al-Waḥīd al-Bihbihānī (d. 1205/1791) (cited in al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:671) and Bihbihānī’s grandson, Maḥmūd b. Āqā Muḥammad ‘Alī (d. 1269/1852–3), who refers to the letters as praise of al-Mufid but mistakenly states that the letters were sent by the Imam during the Lesser Occultation. Āl Āqā, *Tanbih al-ghāfilīn*, 89. Contemporary Shī‘ī scholars cite the letters in books about the Hidden Imam and the virtues of the ulama. See for example, al-Qurashī, *Ḥayāt al-Imām al-Mahdī*, 75–81, 134; ‘Alī, *al-Mahdī l-muntazar*, 289–94; al-Shīrāzī, *Mīn Qiṣaṣ al-‘ulamā’*, 38; Arastu (trans.), *al-Nudbah*, 101, 113, refers to a statement from one of the letters in a footnote to his translation of the famous Shī‘ī supplication known as *du‘ā’ al-nudba*. (The *du‘ā’ al-nudba* is attributed in some Shī‘ī sources to the sixth Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, and in others to the Hidden Imam, from the period of the Lesser Occultation. See idem, ix–xi. See also Anṣārī, *Barrasīhā-yi tārikhī*, 667–74.)
- 37 [= *da‘wāhu al-mushāhada al-manfiyya ba’d al-ghayba al-kubrā*] Al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *Rijāl al-Sayyid Baḥr al-‘Ulūm*, 3:320.

various hadiths negating the possibility of seeing the Imam. The same assessment about the letters addressed to al-Mufid is echoed by al-Khū'ī: "It is not possible to be certain about the authenticity of these *tawqī'āt* that are said to have been sent from the Sacred Precincts [of the Hidden Imam] because al-Mufid was born seven or nine years after the [start of the] Greater Occultation and we do not know how they reached al-Mufid."³⁸ Al-Khū'ī's point about the year of al-Mufid's birth is likewise an allusion to the "lying impostor" passage of the final *tawqī'* of the Hidden Imam to the fourth emissary. That is, according to al-Khū'ī, since al-Mufid was born and lived *after* the end of the Lesser Occultation, he could not have been in contact with the Imam, since the final *tawqī'* prohibits such contact. Among Western scholars, Devin Stewart suggests that the letters are "forgeries," adding that they represent "attempts to smooth over the discontinuity between the period of the Lesser Occultation and that of the Greater Occultation."³⁹

These few accounts notwithstanding, stories of encounters with the Imam during the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries are extremely rare. Ḥasan Anṣārī postulates that the story of an encounter with the Hidden Imam and al-Khiḍr in the future site of the mosque of Jamkarān outside Qum may have originated in this period in a work (that has not survived) by Muḥammad b. al-Fattāl al-Niṣhābūrī (d. 508/1114–5).⁴⁰ None of the works by any of the other Twelver Shī'ī scholars I am aware of, who lived in the more than a century that separates al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and al-Rāwandī and Ibn Shahrāshūb and whose writings include sections or chapters on the Hidden Imam that have survived and been published broaches the topic of encounters with him during the Greater Occultation. They include Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb's (fl. late fifth/eleventh century) *'Uyūn al-mu'jizāt*,⁴¹ al-Sudābādī's (fl. fifth/eleventh century) *al-Muqni'*

38 Al-Khū'ī, *Muḥjam rijāl al-ḥadīth*, 18:220. See also al-Kātib, *Ṭaṭawwur al-fikr*, 346–7.

39 Stewart, "An Eleventh-Century Justification," 486.

40 See Anṣārī, *Barrasiḥā-yi tārikhī*, 647–54 ("Mūnis al-ḥazīn-i Shaykh Ṣadūq va baḥthī dar-bāriḥ-yi mizān-i iṣḥālat-i ḥikāyat-i maṣjid-i Jamkarān"). For the story of the encounter with the Imam and al-Khiḍr at Jamkarān, see al-Ṣaffār al-Najafī, *Mawsū'at al-imām*, 3:31–5. The encounter is said to have taken place in the late fourth/tenth century, but there is no documentary evidence to support this. On the mosque of Jamkarān and its growing messianic significance, especially after the Islamic revolution, see Calmard, "Jamkarān," *Elr* (online); Rahimi, "Jamkarān: Embodiment and Messianic Experience in the Making of Digital Pilgrimage;" Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism*, 227–32, 241, 246; Cook, "Waiting for the Twelfth Imam," 135–7, 140–2. See also the introduction of this book.

41 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *'Uyūn al-mu'jizāt*. On this work, see al-Ṭihārānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 15:383–5 (no. 2390); Anūshah, "Ḥusayn b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb," *DMT*, 6:333. *'Uyūn al-mu'jizāt* was among the sources used by Safavid scholars such as al-Majlisī (in compiling *Bihār al-anwār*), al-Ḥurr al-Āmilī (in compiling *Ithbāt al-hudā*), and Ḥāshim al-Bahrānī (in compiling *Madi'*

fi l-imāma,⁴² Mutāqil b. ‘Aṭīyya’s (d. 505/1111–2) *Muḥāwala ḥawl al-imāma wa-l-khilāfa* (also called *Mu’tamar ‘ulamā’ Baghdād fi l-imāma wa-l-khilāfa*),⁴³ the aforementioned Muḥammad b. al-Fattāl al-Nishābūrī’s *Rawḍat al-wā’izīn wa-baṣīrat al-mutta’izīn*,⁴⁴ Ibn al-Khashshāb al-Baghdādī’s (d. 567/1172) *Tārīkh al-a’imma wa-wafayātihim*,⁴⁵ and Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī’s (d. 585/1189–90 or 588/1192–3) *al-Thāqib fi l-manāqib*.⁴⁶ All of these works cite accounts of the Hidden Imam’s birth, reports of those who claimed to have seen him during the Lesser Occultation, or *tawqīāt* issued by the Imam to the *sufarā’*, as “proofs” of his existence. However, these works do not contain any stories of sightings or contact with the Hidden Imam during the period of the Greater Occultation, up to the date in which each writer lived. Even works produced earlier, such as Ḥasan Ash‘arī-Qummī’s (d. ca. 378/988–9) *Tārīkh-i Qum*, which has survived in the form of a Persian translation from the early ninth/fifteenth century and contains a brief chapter on the birth and *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam as well as hadiths aiming to prove his existence⁴⁷ do not contain accounts of any physical sightings of the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation. It would be safe to presume that if such stories existed or were in circulation, they would have been cited in these apologetic and historical works.

nat al-ma’ājiz). In the chapter of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s work on the Hidden Imam, he discusses the wisdom of the *ghayba* and records several *tawqīāt*. The latter are accounts of some of the Lesser Occultation encounters mentioned in earlier works such as *Uṣūl al-kāfi* and *Kamāl al-dīn*. In this section of his work, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb bemoans a group of Shī‘a whom he labels as being among “the opponents.” These people believe in the Mahdī but have serious doubts about how anyone could live longer than one hundred years. In response, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb adduces the traditional proofs found in *Kamāl al-dīn* about earlier prophets whose lives were miraculously prolonged by God. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Uyūn al-mu’jizāt*, 138–46.

42 The author may have been a contemporary of al-Ṭūsī. See the biographical introduction in al-Sudābādī, *al-Muqni’ fi l-imāma*, 20–37. He also wrote a book about the proofs of the Imams, in particular the twelfth Imam (see *ibid.*, 151), but that work has not survived.

43 Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, *Mu’tamar ‘ulamā’ Baghdād*. On this work, see al-Rifā‘ī, *Mu’jam mā kutiba ‘an al-rasūl wa-ahl baytīhi*, 6:323–4 (no. 15868).

44 Al-Nishābūrī, *Rawḍat al-wā’izīn*. On this work, see al-Ṭihri, *al-Dharī‘a*, 11:305 (no. 1815).

45 Al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh al-a’imma wa-wafayātihim*. The chapter on the Hidden Imam includes hadiths on Quranic verses said to have been revealed about the Imam in addition to reports concerning the advent of the Qā’im and the government (*dawla*) he is to establish.

46 Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *al-Thāqib fi l-manāqib*. On this work, see al-Ṭihri, *al-Dharī‘a*, 5:4.

47 See Ash‘arī-Qummī, *Tārīkh-i Qum*, 532–5.

2 The “Invention” of a Tradition

The two individuals who deserve more credit than any other scholar for popularizing the idea of encountering the Hidden Imam are the adroit Iraqi Shīʿī scholar ʿAlī Raḍī l-Dīn, known as Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266), and his student, Bahāʾ al-Dīn ʿAlī b. ʿIsā b. Abī l-Faṭḥ al-Irbilī (d. 692/1292–3 or 693/1293–4).

Known as “Ṣāḥib al-karāmāt” (someone to whom, or through whom, God performs miracles), hagiographical sources often point to Ibn Ṭāwūs’s propensity for asceticism, for having been given the greatest name of God (*ism Allāh al-aʿẓam*), and for being in contact with the Hidden Imam.⁴⁸ In one of his earliest surviving works, *al-Ṭarāʾif fi maʿrifat madhāhib al-tawāʾif*, a polemical anti-Sunnī work that appeared under a pseudonym (suggesting that Ibn Ṭāwūs was practicing *taqīyya*) and was likely written around 633/1236,⁴⁹ Ibn Ṭāwūs furnishes the same arguments and proofs to support the existence of the Hidden Imam—and justify the Imam’s *ghayba*—that are found in earlier apologias such as al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn*. In relation to the *ghayba*, his main argument is based on the notion of fear: the Imam was forced to enter *ghayba* under threat of being killed. Ibn Ṭāwūs refers to the final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam to the last emissary, but he intentionally—one might say brazenly—omits the sentence declaring anyone claiming to see the Imam “a lying impostor”:

When the matter [of the *sifāra* (“emissaryhood”)] reached ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Samurī, he said that the Mahdī informed him that he [al-Samurī] would [soon] pass away, revealed the day of his death to him, and instructed him not to appoint anyone else [as an emissary] because the [time of the] complete *ghayba* had arrived, when the believers would be tested, for such is God’s method carried into effect of old.⁵⁰

After leaving out the “lying impostor” passage, Ibn Ṭāwūs maintains that “after (al-Samurī’s death), many Shīʿa and non-Shīʿa met the Mahdī”⁵¹ and he [the

48 On Ibn Ṭāwūs, see Kohlberg, “Ebn Ṭāwūs,” *EI*, 7:55–8; Yūsufi-Ishkavarī, “Āl-i Ṭāwūs,” *DMBI* (online) and the sources mentioned there; Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 3–24; Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam*, 314. On his alleged supernatural abilities, see Rafīʿī, *Imām-i zamān*, 133–5, 174–268; Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 14.

49 On this work, see Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 57–9 (no. 51); Anṣārī, *Az Ganjīnahā-yi nusakh-i khaṭṭī*, 111–2.

50 Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Ṭarāʾif*, 1:184.

51 [= *wa-la-qad laqiya al-mahdī khalqun kathīrun baʿda dhālika min shīʿatihi wa-ghayrihim*]

Imam] furnished proofs (*dalā'il*) to establish his identity to these people.⁵² Who were these “many Shī'a and non-Shī'a” who encountered the Imam after the death of the fourth emissary? In this work, Ibn Ṭāwūs does not cite a single account. He then asserts that “even if [the Imam] is not visible today to all of his Shī'a, it is not impossible for a group of them to encounter him, benefit from his words and deeds and conceal [this fact from others].”⁵³

Some years later, in his *Kashf al-maḥajja li-thamarat al-muhja*, completed in 649/1251–2 and dedicated to his sons Muḥammad and 'Alī,⁵⁴ Ibn Ṭāwūs recalls being approached one day by a fellow believer (whose identity is not revealed) who was 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 Ṭāwūs, “Why does [the Imam] not just meet one of his followers and resolve the conflicts and differences that have arisen among them on matters of religious doctrine and law?” Rather than answer the question directly, Ibn Ṭāwūs responded that God is more powerful than the Imam in dispelling the source of contention among Muslims and yet has chosen not to intervene. The same explanation can be applied to the reasons the Imam does not reveal himself to quell their differences.⁵⁵ In other words, if the Imam wished, he could appear to some or all of his followers, but he chooses not to, on account of a wisdom known to God alone. One would guess from this answer that Ibn Ṭāwūs was averse to the possibility of seeing the Hidden Imam. However, Ibn Ṭāwūs then entrusts his son Muḥammad to the Hidden Imam and instructs him to place the Imam's needs, at all times, before his own. Ibn Ṭāwūs mentions that he himself dreamt of the Imam in several places (or shrines).⁵⁶ In these dreams, the Imam answered his prayers and confirmed and blessed his family.⁵⁷ His statement later in the same work that “the path to your Imam is open (*al-ṭariq maftūḥa ilā imāmika*) to those upon whom God wishes to shower

52 For a partial Persian translation of this passage, see Rafī'i, *Imām-i zamān*, 131–2.

53 Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Ṭarā'if*, 1:184–5. Persian translation: 'Alipūr, *Jilvahnāy-i pinhān-i imām-i 'aṣr*, 128.

54 On *Kashf al-maḥajja 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 entitled *Tashīl al-sabīl bi-l-ḥujja fī intikhāb kashf al-maḥajja li-thamarat al-muhja*.

55 Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Kashf al-maḥajja*, 150–1.

56 [= *ra'aynāhu fī 'iddat maqāmāt fī manāmāt*]

57 Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Kashf al-maḥajja*, 151; al-Kāshānī, *Tashīl al-sabīl*, 56. Cf. al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Janat al-ma'wā*, 130, who reproduces the passage from *Kashf al-maḥajja*, though in his version the word *munājāt* (prayers; while praying) appears in place of *manāmāt* (dreams; while dreaming).

His loving kindness or treat favorably”⁵⁸ should likely be understood in the context of receiving guidance and confirmation from the Imam in dreams.

In two other works, Ibn Ṭāwūs speaks of corporeal 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 maʿrifat al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām min ʿilm al-nujūm*, completed in 650/1252,⁵⁹ 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 in reply to requests that were made to him. One of these individuals is a person whose words I know to be true, yet he 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. He then dreamt that he would see [the Imam] at a time that he specified (*fā-raʿā fī manāmihi annahu shāhiduhu fī waqtin ashāra ilayhi*). He told me that when the specified time arrived, he was visiting the shrine of Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim. He heard a voice that he had heard before, when visiting the shrine of Imam al-Jawād.⁶⁰ 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 by his side. He saw him [that is, Imam Mahdī], but out of respect, refrained from saying a word while he was in [the Mahdī’s] presence (*wa-shāhadahu wa-lam yukhātibhu fī shayʿ li-wujūb al-taʿdīb bayna yadayhi*).⁶¹

58 Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Kashf al-maḥajja*, 154; al-Kāshānī, *Tashīl al-sabil*, 57; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-maʿwā*, 131. Persian translation: Rafīʿī, *Imām-i zamān*, 131.

59 On this work, see Matar, “The *Faraj al-Mahmūm* of Ibn Ṭāwūs”; Matar, “Dreams and Dream Interpretation”; Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 10, 32–3 (no. 10).

60 The shrines of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and his grandson Muḥammad al-Taqī al-Jawād (d. 218/834), the seventh and ninth Imams respectively, are adjacent to one another in the town of Kāẓimayn (originally called al-Mashhad al-Kāẓimī) in Iraq. See Streck and Dixon, “Kāẓimayn,” *ET*², 4:854–6. Streck and Dixon mention that the earliest evidence of pilgrimages to these shrines dates from the seventh/thirteenth century, citing the Arab biographer Ibn Khallikān’s (d. 681/1282) *Wafayāt [al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ al-zamān]*, completed in 672/1274. See Fück, “Ibn Khallikān,” *ET*², 3:833. Ibn Ṭāwūs’s account was written about twenty-two years before Ibn Khallikān’s work.

61 A manuscript of *Faraj al-mahmūm fī maʿrifat al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām min ʿilm al-nujūm* is reproduced in appendix one of Matar’s dissertation, “The *Faraj al-Mahmūm* of Ibn Ṭāwūs.” This passage is found in fol. no. 175 of this appendix. The passage is repeated in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:53. For a Persian translation, see al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:528 (no. 13);

Ibn Ṭāwūs proceeds to mention two other individuals, whom he again does not name but whom he describes as being trustworthy and sincere, the first of whom contacted the Hidden Imam and asked for permission to accompany and serve the Imam during his *ghayba*, and the second of whom wrote a letter to the Imam comprising questions on a number of unspecified weighty matters, placed the letter in the underground cellar (*sirdāb*) in Samarra, and witnessed one of the servants of the Imam appear at around midnight and collect the letter.⁶²

Additionally, in his *al-Muwāsaʿa wa-l-muḍāyaqa* (also known as *Risāla fī l-muḍāyaqa fī fawāt al-ṣalā*), completed on 18 Rabīʿ 661/1 March 1263,⁶³ Ibn Ṭāwūs states: “I heard from someone, whose name I will not mention,⁶⁴ that he contacted our master [the Hidden Imam], 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.”⁶⁵

Rafīʿī, *Imām-i zamān*, 132. For an earlier English translation, see Matar, “The *Faraj al-Mahmūm* of Ibn Ṭāwūs,” 346–7.

- 62 Matar, “The *Faraj al-Mahmūm* of Ibn Ṭāwūs,” fol. 176 of the appendix (original Arabic text); idem, 349–50 (English translation). The *sirdāb* (Persian pronunciation: *sardāb*) 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 Shiʿite Religion*, 233; Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam*, 161–2. By the late fifth/eleventh century, it was a place of pilgrimage for the Shīʿa. See Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism,” 271. The Moroccan explorer Ibn Baṭūṭa (d. 779/1368–9) recounts that he observed Shīʿa in Samarra waiting for the Mahdī to emerge from a well (almost certainly a reference to the *sirdāb*). The believers also kept a horse tied nearby, ready for the Imam to use as soon as he appeared. See Shamīsā, *Farhang-i talmīhāt*, 566; cf. Ourghi, *Schütischer 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. For a physical description of the *sirdāb*, see Šāhibī, “Bāb-i ghaybat dar Sāmārā.” A shrine with a turquoise dome has been built over the *sirdāb*. It is adjacent to the shrines of Imam al-Hādī (d. 254/868) and Imam al-ʿAskarī. All three shrines are important sites of pilgrimage and constitute part of the “sublime thresholds” (*al-atabāt al-ʿāliyat*) [i.e., the Shīʿī shrine cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kāzīmāyān, and Samarra]. In anti-Shīʿī polemical works written by Sunnī scholars, the Shīʿī belief that the Hidden Imam is concealed in the *sirdāb* is often a subject of ridicule and has occasioned sharp ripostes from Shīʿī writers (see the comments by al-Irbilī below). See, e.g., al-Ghurayfī, *al-Imām al-muntaẓar*, 5:426; Shahīdī, *Ẓuhūr-i ḥaḍrat-i Mahdī*, 167–71.
- 63 Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 53. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, “Contribution à la Typologie,” 129, who gives the date as 641/1243.
- 64 It is commonly understood that Ibn Ṭāwūs is speaking about himself. Javādī (ed.), “Ibn Ṭāwūs, Sayyid Raḍī al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Mūsā,” *DMT*, 1:345, writes that, “it has been mentioned that (Ibn Ṭāwūs) met the Hidden Imam.”
- 65 This passage is quoted in al-Astarābādī (d. 1033/1623–4 or 1036/1626–7), *al-Fawāʿid al-*

It is likely that Ibn Ṭāwūs is the believer in both of the above accounts. This may have been what was understood by his interlocutors and readers. Perhaps for political reasons, or perhaps in an attempt to be seen as being faithful to the final *tawqīf* of the Imam—for surely the “lying impostor” warning of the final *tawqīf* was known to other Shīʿī ulama at his time—Ibn Ṭāwūs chose to relate and obfuscate the encounters in the third person.

In his *Jamāl al-usbūʿ bi-kamāl al-ʿamal al-mashrūʿ*, while commenting on a supplication that alludes to the coming of other Imams, who will appear from among the descendants of the Qāʾim, Ibn Ṭāwūs mentions an intriguing discovery: “I found a report with a continuous chain of transmission (*riwāya muttasīlat al-isnād*) stating that the Mahdī has pious sons ruling over a number of islands in the sea.”⁶⁶ This report appears to be the story of the archipelago of five islands ruled by the Hidden Imam and his sons.⁶⁷

Elsewhere, in his *Muhaj al-daʿawāt wa-manhaj al-ibādāt*—one of his last works, written in 662/1263–4—Ibn Ṭāwūs claims that he himself heard the voice of the Hidden Imam.⁶⁸ He reports that on 13 Dhū l-Qaʿda 638/2 June 1241, while praying in the underground cellar (*sirdāb*) in Samarra, he heard the Imam recite a short prayer sotto voce.⁶⁹ It is worth noting that he explicitly avoids mentioning that he saw the Imam here, saying that he merely heard the Imam’s voice. Perhaps the final *tawqīf* of the Imam was at the forefront of his mind. After all, the “lying impostor” passage of the final *tawqīf* declares that anyone who claims to have seen the Imam is a liar, but it does not specify the same about those who claim to hear the Imam’s voice.⁷⁰

madanīyya, 91; For a Persian translation, see al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:527 (account no. 12). In the margins of pages 30–40 of a 1321/1904 MS of al-Astarābādī’s *al-Fawāʾid al-madanīyya*, Amir-Moezzi (“Contribution à la Typologie,” 129–30) read an account of Ibn Ṭāwūs’s companion’s dream of the Hidden Imam, cited by Astarābādī from Ibn Ṭāwūs’s *al-Muwāsaʿa wa-l-muḍāyaqa*. Amir-Moezzi adds 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 dans un état extatique.” The published 1424/2003 edition of *al-Fawāʾid al-madanīyya* does not contain this account.

66 Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Jamāl al-usbūʿ*, 310. On this work, see Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 40–1 (no. 22).

67 Al-Nūrī, *Jannat al-maʿwā*, 32, interprets Ibn Ṭāwūs’s statement as a “definite” (*maqṭūʿ*) reference to the story of the five islands. For the story, see *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:462–72 (no. 2).

68 On *Muhaj al-daʿawāt*, see Daryābīgī, “*Muhaj al-daʿawāt wa-manhaj al-ibādāt*,” *DMT*, 15:550.

69 Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Muhaj al-daʿawāt*, 296. Also cited in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:61 (no. 50); al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-maʿwā*, 127–9 (no. 55); al-Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 417 (no. 6). Persian translation: al-Majlisī, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 339; Tunkābunī, *Qiṣaṣ al-ʿulamāʾ*, 380. On *Muhaj al-daʿawāt*, see Daryābīgī, “*Muhaj al-daʿawāt wa-manhaj al-ibādāt*,” *DMT*, 15:550.

70 Another collection of prayers attributed to Ibn Ṭāwūs which has not survived is in his

Until the time of Ibn Ṭāwūs, eminent Shīʿī ulama had only spoken of the possibility of seeing the Imam during the Greater Occultation. With Ibn Ṭāwūs, encountering the Imam became possible and entered the realm of actuality. Yet, although Ibn Ṭāwūs himself claimed to have seen the Imam in dreams (like al-Ṣādūq), he is careful to never explicitly say that he saw the Imam while awake or in person. Here, comments by some Western scholars⁷¹ and Shīʿī ulama⁷² need to be modulated; the earliest work to feature a story of Ibn Ṭāwūs encountering the Hidden Imam while awake was written more than a century after his death.⁷³

It is worth speculating as to why Ibn Ṭāwūs was so keen to emphasize that many have met the Hidden Imam. At a time of great turmoil, in face of the cataclysm of the Mongol invasion and the imminent fall of the Abbasid Empire, Ibn Ṭāwūs believed, as did many of his contemporaries, that the end times were at hand. He interpreted 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. Then, one night (12 Rabīʿ 662/13 January 1264), “the thought occurred to [him] and [he] immediately knew”⁷⁴ that the one whose appearance al-Ṣādiq had heralded was none other than Ibn Ṭāwūs himself, because he was descended from both Imams al-Ḥasan (d. 50/670) and al-Ḥusayn (d. 61/680) and because the Mongol ruler had appointed him the chief (*naqīb*) of the ‘Alids, the titular

Kitāb ighāthat al-dāʿi wa-ʿānat al-sāʿi, which is said to have contained a number of prayers ascribed to the Hidden Imam. See Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 35–6. In his earliest work, *Miṣbāḥ al-zāʿir wa-janāḥ al-musāfir*, Ibn Ṭāwūs included a visitation prayer (*ziyāra*) for the Hidden Imam with the words, “O God! Show us the blessed face of your Friend (*wajh walīyyika al-maymūn*) while we are alive and after [our] death.” Cited in al-Mashhadī (d. 610/1213–4), *al-Mazār al-kabīr*, 658; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 53:95; al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 2:299. On *Miṣbāḥ al-zāʿir*, which also contains a prayer of visitation for the resting places of the *sufarāʾ*, see al-Tihirānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, 21:107 (no. 4155); Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 46–8.

71 E.g., Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam*, 94, states that Ibn Ṭāwūs “claimed to have met the Hidden Imam,” but he does not specify 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 Hidden Imam in a dream during a journey to the shrine of ‘Alī in Najaf in 641/1263. Matar references Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam*, 94, but Momen 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 ‘Alī.

72 E.g., al-Mūsawī, *al-Liqāʾ al-mahdawī*, 141, states that no other scholar has met the Hidden Imam as often as Ibn Ṭāwūs.

73 See al-Nīlī, *al-Sultān al-mufarrīj*, 57–61 (no. 10) (on this work, see below). This account was subsequently cited by al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:75–7, and other scholars after him.

74 [= *ghalaba ḡanni wa-ʿaraftu*]

head of the Shī'a of Baghdad.⁷⁵ It is thus significant to note that Ibn Ṭāwūs hints that he may live to see the days of the Imam's complete and consummate manifestation.⁷⁶ He writes that "these, God willing, are the days of the appearance of those suns [that is, the *raj'a* of the Prophet and the Imams], a time when all pain and suffering will end."⁷⁷ The purpose of emphasizing that "many Shī'a and non-Shī'a" had encountered the Imam may have been to support his belief that the end of the Imam's *ghayba* was imminent.

But the *ghayba* of course did not end. Still, Ibn Ṭāwūs's influence on future scholars who wrote about the issue of encounters with the Imam is evident, beginning with his student, the prominent Iraqi traditionist, jurist, and poet Bahā' al-Dīn 'Alī b. 'Īsā b. Abī l-Faṭḥ al-Irbilī (d. 692/1292–3 or 693/1293–4).⁷⁸ Al-Irbilī's most famous work, *Kashf al-ghumma fī ma'rīfat al-a'imma* (completed in 682/1283–4), is a biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, Fāṭima and the twelve Imams.⁷⁹ The final chapter of this work includes several accounts of sightings of and contact with the Hidden Imam during the Lesser Occultation. Al-Irbilī takes great exception to Sunnīs who claim that the Shī'a believe the Hidden Imam is hiding in an underground chamber (*sirdāb*) in Samarra. He maintains that the Shī'a have never claimed that the Hidden Imam is in the *sirdāb* permanently but rather believe that "he comes and goes and travels around the earth, [entering peoples'] homes and tents, accompanied by [his] servants (*khadam*), entourage (*hasham*), camels, horses, and so forth."⁸⁰ In addition, and more significantly for our purposes, al-Irbilī records "two sto-

75 See Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 12; Halm, *Shī'ism*, 63.

76 [= *ayyām zuhūrihi al-kāmil*]

77 [= *fa-hādihā awān zuhūr tilka al-shumūs wa-zawāl al-ḡurr wa-l-bu's*] Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Kashf al-maḥajja*, 154.

78 On al-Irbilī, see Qurbānī-Zarrīn, "Bahā' al-Dīn Irbilī," *DJI* (online); Javādī (ed.), "Irbilī," *DMT*, 2:54–5. Algar, "Imam Musa al-Kazim and Sufi Tradition," 5, mistakenly identifies al-Irbilī as a Sunnī, perhaps because he transmitted hadiths from Sunnī sources in his *Kashf al-ghumma*, including, most prominently, from the Syrian Shāfi'ī jurist Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad al-Ganjī al-Shāfi'ī (d. 658/1260), a Sunnī scholar who sympathized strongly with 'Alī, as demonstrated in his *Kifāyat al-ṭālib fī manāqib 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib*, and who supported the Shī'ī belief that the Hidden Imam was the Mahdī, as can be seen in his oft-published and oft-cited (in Shī'ī apologetic literature) *Kitāb al-bayān fī akhbār ṣāhib al-zamān*, in which he cites Sunnī hadiths to prove that the Mahdī was the twelfth Imam. On these works, see Madelung, "al-Mahdī," *ET*², 5:1236; Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 218 (no. 268).

79 See al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 18:47–8 (no. 619), who gives the title as *Kashf al-ghumma 'an ma'rīfat aḥwāl al-a'imma wa-ahl bayt al-iṣma*. A popular work, *Kashf al-ghumma* was translated into Persian in the Safavid period; both the original Arabic text and the Persian translation have been published numerous times.

80 Al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:991.

ries of encounters with the Imam that occurred near his own time,⁸¹ which he heard from “a group of trustworthy brethren”:⁸² (1) the story of a certain Ismā‘īl b. al-Ḥasan al-Hirqīlī from al-Ḥilla which appears to have been transmitted to him by Ibn Ṭāwūs, who features prominently in the story,⁸³ and (2) the account of the father of a certain al-Bāqī b. ‘Aṭwa al-‘Alawī al-Ḥusaynī.⁸⁴ Al-Irbilī appears to have heard the latter directly from al-Bāqī, then confirmed its veracity with others. In both accounts, a mysterious stranger heals a presumably incurable disease, vanishes, and is believed, after he disappears, to have been the Hidden Imam. Upon recounting these two stories, al-Irbilī adds that he knows of many accounts of Shī‘a who lost their way en route to Mecca, were saved from certain death by the Hidden Imam, and returned to their home or caravan. He then says that he does not wish to prolong the issue; otherwise, he would mention some of these accounts. Instead, the two accounts that occurred close to his own time are deemed sufficient. Thus he suggests that the stories he has in mind of believers who were saved en route to Mecca are from the Lesser Occultation.⁸⁵ The third and only other Greater Occultation account that al-Irbilī cites is the aforementioned story of the youth and the Black Stone.⁸⁶

Unlike his teacher Ibn Ṭāwūs, who misrepresented the final *tawqī‘* of the Imam, al-Irbilī attempts to reconcile the final *tawqī‘* with the position that we cannot be certain as to whether it is possible or not to see the Imam during the Greater Occultation:

81 [= *qiṣṣatayn qaruba ‘ahduhumā min zamānī*]

82 [= *jamā‘a min thiqāt ikhwānī*]

83 Al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:991–4; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:61–3 (no. 51); al-Baḥrānī, *Bahjat al-naẓar*, 199–202; al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 1:396–400; al-Badrī, *Gharā’ib al-akhbār*, 66–9. For a Persian translation or summary, see Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 629–33; al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 478–83; al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:485–91 (no. 5); Nūrī-Ṭabarsī², *Kifāyat al-muwahhidīn*, 2:819; al-Ḥā’irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 2:5–8 (no. 2); Jalālī-‘Azīziyān, *Nigāh-i Sabz*, 85–100; Bābā’ī, *Dāstānhā va karāmāt-i khāndanī*, 138–42. For an English translation, see Dewji, *Imame Zaman Hazrat Mehdi* (trans. Lakha), 144–7. The story is also referred to in Kohlberg, “Authoritative Scripture,” 309 n. 75; Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, 8 (no. 45).

84 Al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:994–5; al-Baḥrānī, *Bahjat al-naẓar*, 202; al-Baḥrānī, *Ḥilyat al-abrār*, 6:507; al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba*, 1:402–3; al-Ḥā’irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 2:5 (no. 1). Persian translation: al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 484.

85 Al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:995. See the partial Persian translation in Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 634. It is also cited in al-Baḥrānī, *Bahjat al-naẓar*, 198–9, and in Kawrānī, *Ḥawāruyāt al-mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 49–50.

86 Al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:999–1000. He transmits the account on the authority of al-Rāwandī.

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 *tawqīf* and the stories of those who have seen the Imam during the Greater Occultation], but God knows best.⁸⁷

In other words, it is perfectly acceptable if someone sees the Imam, as long as they do not disclose to others that that they have seen him. This position was advanced in a more subtle manner in the works of al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī. In fact, al-Irbilī cites the position of al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī, that is, that each person can only know and speak about his own self, verbatim, in order justify his inclusion of stories of encounters from the Greater Occultation.⁸⁸ However, he makes no attempt to resolve the tension between the solution that he advances and the two stories he mentions of individuals who were met and healed by the Imam and who *did* tell others about their experiences.

A contemporary of both Ibn Ṭāwūs and al-Irbilī, Kamāl al-Dīn Maytham al-Baḥrānī (d. after 681/1280) was an associate of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), a teacher of ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, and the author of an important commentary on the *Nahj al-balāgha*.⁸⁹ He is credited with having led the Shī‘ī renaissance in Bahrain in the late seventh/thirteenth century. Al-Baḥrānī stipulates:

We reject the notion that the Hidden Imam cannot appear to his intimate friends (*awliyā’ihi*). He *does* appear to them and they take legal rulings (*aḥkāṃ*) from him. In fact, legal rulings, answers to [legal and theologi-

87 [= *walladhī arāhu annahu in kāna yarāhu aḥadun fa-qad ‘ulima minhum annahum lā yadda’ūna ru’yatahu wa-mushāhadatahu wa-inna alladhī yadda’ihā kadhdhābun fa-lā munāqaḍa idhan wa-llāhu a’lam*] Al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*², 3:347. The text of al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:1031, is defective, as it is missing the conjunction *in* in the protasis *in kāna yarāhu aḥad*.

88 Al-Irbilī, *Kashf al-ghumma*¹, 2:1034. This reason was repeated by other scholars who mention accounts encounters during the Greater Occultation, e.g., al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 51:196; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma’wā*, 150–1. It is also mentioned in al-Ṭabrisī, *I’lām al-warā*, 2:303.

89 On him, see Mavani, “Doctrine of Imamate,” 221–45, esp. ch. 6; Oraibi, “Shī‘ī Renaissance”; Oraibi, “Rationalism in the School of Bahrain,” 331–43; Corbin, *History*, 320–1; Lawson, “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy,” 128. Nasr, “Shī‘ism and Sufism,” 238, refers to al-Baḥrānī’s famous commentary on the *Nahj al-balāgha*. Note that Kamāl al-Dīn Maytham al-Baḥrānī should not be mistaken for his teacher, ‘Alī. b. Sulaymān Kamāl al-Dīn (or Jamāl al-Dīn) Baḥrānī (fl. late seventh/thirteenth century), one of the scholars often credited with bridging the divide between *tashayyū’* and *taṣawwuf* in the period following the Mongol invasion. On the latter, see Madelung, “Baḥrānī, Jamāl al-Dīn (also Kamāl al-Dīn),” *Elr*, 3:529.

cal] questions (*masā'il*), and other things have come to them from him in the form of prayers and letters as is well known among the Twelver Shī'a.⁹⁰

Al-Baḥrānī does not provide any examples to support this statement. He may be alluding to the aforementioned letters to al-Mufīd; however, these letters do not contain 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 the Imam may in fact *not* appear to any of his intimate friends (*awliyā'*), even if they may be worthy of the honor of meeting the Imam, may love him deeply, or may be in urgent need of his help. However, al-Baḥrānī contends that if the Imam chooses not to appear to anyone, it is due to one of two reasons. First, no matter how virtuous a person may be, he is inclined to achieve fame and acquire social rank and status (*jāh*). If the Imam appears to someone who might, for instance, be poor, that person might boast about his encounter with the Imam to others and may not be able to resist divulging this secret to people close to him like his brother, son, or wife. The secret would inevitably circulate and result in social disorder and corruption (*fasād*). Second, in order for the Hidden Imam to prove his identity, he must perform miracles (*karāmāt*) in the presence of his closest friends. Should his friends entertain doubts about these miracles, they would be forced to seek the help of others to determine their veracity. And if the enemies of the Imam are among the people from whom they seek help, they would betray the Imam to his enemies.⁹¹

It merits noting in this connection that although al-Irbilī and al-Baḥrānī leave open the possibility of seeing the Imam during the Greater Occultation, their more famous student, the celebrated scholar Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. 'Alī b. Muṭaḥhar, known as 'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325)—perhaps the most important figure in the development of Shī'ī *fiqh*—adopted the position of the early traditionists.⁹² Although later hagiographical sources, written after the tradition of encountering the Imam had become solidified, claim that al-Ḥillī twice encountered the Hidden Imam, he himself maintained in *Nahj al-mustarshidīn fī uṣūl al-dīn* that “The (Hidden) Imam has concealed himself for a reason known only to God or because he fears for his life, from both his enemies and

90 Al-Baḥrānī, *al-Najā fī l-qiyāma*, 50–1. On this work, see al-Oraibi, “Shī'ī Renaissance,” 54; Mavani, “Doctrine of Imamate,” 227.

91 Oraibi, “Shī'ī Renaissance” 157. I have slightly modified Oraibi's summary after consulting the original language text in al-Baḥrānī, *al-Najā fī l-qiyāma*, 51.

92 On him, see Jafri, “al-Ḥillī (1),” *ET*², 3:390; Schmidtke, “Ḥelli, Ḥasan b. Yusuf b. Muṭaḥhar,” *ELr*, 12:164–9.

his friends. He thus does not appear to anyone, publicly or privately.”⁹³ Moreover, al-Ḥillī chose not to address the issue of encountering the Imam in any form in his reason-based defense of the imamate, *Minhāj al-karāma fi maʿrifat al-imāma*,⁹⁴ or in the chapter on the imamate of another apologetic work, *Nahj al-ḥaqq wa-kashf al-ṣidq*, or in the section of his popular theological work and highly influential summary of Shīʿī beliefs and doctrines.⁹⁵ This summary has attracted scholarly attention (in the form of over twenty commentaries) as a concise presentation of Shīʿī doctrines, and superseded every other Shīʿī creed in modern times.⁹⁶ Al-Miqdād b. ʿAbdallāh al-Suyūrī al-Ḥillī (d. 826/1423), known as al-Fāḍil al-Miqdād, also avoids the issue of contact with the Imam in his commentary on al-Ḥillī’s creed, though al-Fāḍil al-Miqdād maintains that all of the Imams performed miracles; on this he refers readers to al-Rāwandī’s *al-Kharāʾij wa-l-jarāʾih*.⁹⁷

Only a small number of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam have come to light from the eighth/fourteenth or ninth/fifteenth centuries.⁹⁸ The period between the Mongol invasion and conquest of Persia and Iraq and the establishment of the Safavid dynasty witnessed the growth of Shīʿī Sufi orders

93 [= *fa-lā yazhar ʿamman wa-lā khāṣṣan*] This passage from al-Ḥillī’s *Nahj al-mustarshidīn* is available in al-Miqdād al-Ḥillī’s commentary, *Irshād al-tālibīn*, 377. Cooper provides a slightly 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.” See al-Ḥillī, “Allāma al-Ḥillī on Imamate and Ijithād,” 242.

94 On this work and Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 728/1328) famous, vehement response to it, see Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Critique of Shīʿī Imāmology.”

95 Al-Ḥillī, *al-Bābuʾl-Ḥādī ʿAshar* (trans. Miller), 78 [for a revised translation of his creed, see Watt, *Islamic Creeds*, 103–4].

96 See Schmidtke, “Ḥelli, Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. Moṭahhar,” *Elr*, 12:164–9; Firouzi and Brown, “al-Bāb al-Ḥādī ʿashar,” *EIO*; Jafri, “al-Ḥillī (1),” *ET*², 3:390.

97 See al-Ḥillī, *al-Bābuʾl-Ḥādī ʿAshar* (trans. Miller), 80–1. On al-Miqdād al-Ḥillī, a well-known scholar and jurist and one of the most prominent students of al-Shahīd al-Awwal, see McAuliffe, “Legal Exegesis,” 69–71 (see the section titled “al-Miqdād al-Ḥillī”); Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāmih*, s.v. “Fāḍil-i Miqdād”; Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shīʿī Law*, 49; Karajī, “Fāḍil-i Miqdād.”

98 For example, an account is recorded in a tile at the shrine of the footprint (*qadamgāh*) of Imam ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib near Kashan, which dates to 711/1311–2. The account describes an unnamed believer who sees Imam ʿAlī in a dream. ʿAlī proceeds to lead him into a tent where he encounters an ineffably beautiful, comely, and radiant youth (*javānī dar ghāyat-i ḥusn va jamāl va bahāʾ*). The believer soon learns that this youth is none other than the Hidden Imam, “the lord of the [final] age.” A photograph of the tile is published in Komaroff and Carboni (eds.), *The Legacy of Genghis Khan, Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256–1353*, 58. Referred to in Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shiʿism*, viii; Allan, *The Art and Architecture of Twelver Shiʿism: Iraq, Iran and the Indian Sub-Continent*, 8; Ghaemmaghami, “Numinous Vision, Messianic Encounters,” 63.

(such as the Mar'ashī), the founding of Shī'ī millenarian movements, and the rise of claimants to messianic authority (such as Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394), Muḥammad b. Falāḥ Musha'sha' (d. ca. 866/1462), and Muḥammad Nūrbaksh (d. 869/1464)).⁹⁹ It is possible that the few stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam that exist from this period, circulated, in part, to refute some of these competing claims to authority. The only collection of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam of which I am aware, from the eight/fourteenth or ninth/fifteenth century, is the one compiled by the Iraqī scholar Bahā' al-Dīn 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Nīlī al-Najafī (fl. late eighth/fourteenth to early ninth/fifteenth century; d. after 803/1400–1). This collection is entitled *al-Sultān al-mufarrij 'an ahl al-īmān (fī-man ra'ā ṣāhib al-zamān)* [The sovereign who delivers the faithful from difficulties (concerning those who have seen the lord of the [final] age)]. Al-Nīlī was a student of Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn al-Ḥillī (d. 771/1369–70; son of the aforementioned al-'Allamā al-Ḥillī).¹⁰⁰ *Al-Sultān al-mufarrij* has not survived¹⁰¹ but was reassembled and published in 1426/2005–6 from the stories that have been quoted from it in al-Majlisī's *Bihār al-anwār* and al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī's *Jannat al-ma'wā*. The work is mostly a compilation of stories of encounters with the Imam from the Lesser Occultation, but the first six accounts are stories the author heard from his contemporaries and thus date from the period of the Greater Occultation. Each of these short accounts contains the record of a healing miracle performed by the Imam. For example, account number six tells the story of a Shī'ī who tussled with a rival Sunnī. Just when it seemed the Shī'ī was about to lose, a stranger (who turned out to be the Hidden Imam) appeared, killed the rival Sunnī, and miraculously healed a wound suffered by the Shī'ī during the fight.¹⁰²

Al-Nīlī also devoted a chapter of a different work which has survived, his *Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍr'a (fī dhikr al-qā'im al-ḥujja 'alayhi al-salām)*, to

99 See Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 66–77. On Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī and the Ḥurūfīs, see Mir-Kasimov, "Astarābādī, Faḍlallāh," *ET*³ (online) and Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, 13, 403, where Mir-Kasimov notes that although Astarābādī was ambiguous about the identity of the Mahdī, he was called "the master of time" (*ṣayyid-i zamān*) by his disciples, a term with clear messianic overtones. On Muḥammad b. Falāḥ Musha'sha', see Bashir, "The Imam's Return," 22–6. On Muḥammad Nūrbaksh, see Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 29 ff.

100 On al-Nīlī, see al-Nīlī, *al-Sultān al-mufarrij*, 6–17; al-Nīlī, *Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍr'a*, 11–43; Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāmih*, s.v. "Alī Nīlī." His *nisba*, al-Nīlī, is derived not from the River Nile but rather from the Iraqī town of al-Nīl, situated on the Euphrates River between Baghdad and Kufa. Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāmih*, s.v. "Nīl."

101 Al-Ṭihrahī, *al-Dhar'ā*, 12:217–8 (no. 1439).

102 Al-Nīlī, *al-Sultān al-mufarrij*, 37–50.

“those who saw [the Imam].” This chapter includes fourteen accounts, all of which are found in earlier works that include stories of sightings of the Imam during the Lesser Occultation.¹⁰³ The chapter ends with a list of the names of those who served as the Imam’s deputies (*wukalāʾ*) in various regions during the Lesser Occultation, cited from al-Ṣadūq’s *Kamāl al-dīn*.¹⁰⁴ Al-Nīlī then responds to those who claim that these are all isolated accounts (*akhbār āḥād*) which may as well be unfounded fables and superstitions that do not prove that the Imam lives. Al-Nīlī’s response is quite telling. In answering this assertion, he appeals to the power of deduction (*istidlāl*). He argues that just as the recognition of God, the Prophet, and the previous Imams is not conditioned on visual sightings, one can recognize and believe in the Hidden Imam without seeing him, because “the imamate and seeing (the Imam) are not mutually exclusive. Rather, each one is sufficient in and of itself.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, al-Nīlī argues that it is not necessary for the Imam to be seen, though it is also not impossible.¹⁰⁶

3 The Proliferation of Accounts and the Consolidation of a Tradition

The establishment of a Twelver Shīʿī state (the Safavid Empire) accelerated the appropriation by Twelver Shīʿī clerics of many of the rights, functions, and prerogatives of the Hidden Imam, a process that gained momentum in the Qajar period.¹⁰⁷ It remained to justify this appropriation and suppress any competing attempts to represent the Imam’s authority. The initial reticence to affirm ongoing contact with the Hidden Imam in the Greater Occultation soon gave way to an accelerated, prodigious effort to begin writing, collecting, and pro-

103 Al-Nīlī, *Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍīʿa*, 251–95.

104 See chapter 3 of this book.

105 [= *fa-l-imāma wa-ruʿya lā yatawaqqaf aḥaduhumā ʿalā l-ākhar bal kull wāḥid thābit ʿalā ḥidatihī*] Al-Nīlī, *Muntakhab al-anwār al-muḍīʿa*, 299.

106 The well-known jurist and scholar Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (d. 965/1557–8 or 966/1558–9), known as al-Shahīd al-Thānī, similarly does not refer to encounters with the Imam in explicating the core doctrines of Shīʿī Islam. Al-Shahīd al-Thānī invokes the argument advanced by rationalist scholars in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries and states simply that since death is inevitable, God appointed the Imams to succeed the Prophet Muḥammad until the appearance of “the best of them,” that is, the Mahdī, who is “the Imam of the age,” and whose life has been prolonged so that God may guide the faithful, an act of grace that He is obliged to perform. Al-ʿĀmilī, *Mawsūʿat al-shahīd al-thānī*, 4:37–9. Other ulama have presented the same argument. One example is Mīrzā Rafīʿā Nāʿīnī (d. 1083/1672). See Rizvi, “Seeking the Face of God,” 403.

107 On this development, see the comments provided in the introduction of this book.

liferating stories of encounters—an effort that gained momentum in the thirteenth/nineteenth century but owed its success to, more than any other person, the well-known and powerful Safavid authority Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699–1700).¹⁰⁸

In his works, al-Majlisī does not cite many accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation. This again shows that such stories continued to be uncommon in his time. For example, in a chapter of the volume of his *Biḥār al-anwār* [The ocean of lights] devoted to the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam (completed in Rajab 1078/1667–8),¹⁰⁹ he cites only six accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam, including a story of a miraculous pomegranate that has been mentioned in numerous subsequent books.¹¹⁰ The chapter is titled “Rare are the accounts of those who have seen [the Hidden Imam] during the Greater Occultation close to our time.”¹¹¹

However, al-Majlisī’s most significant and far-reaching contribution to the question of encounters with the Hidden Imam was his attempt to negotiate the palpable epistemological tension between the “lying impostor” warning of the final *tawqīf* and the few stories of encounters with the Imam during the Greater

108 On him, see Davānī, *Allāmah Majlisī*; Mahdavi, *Zindigīnāmih-yi Allāmah Majlisī*; Tārimī, *Allāmah Majlisī*; Kohlberg, “Majlisī, al-,” *ER*, 8:5623; Hairī, “Madjlisī, Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir,” *ET*², 5:1086; Brunner, Majlesi, Moḥammad-Bāqer,” *Elr* (online); Kiyānī-Farīd, “Majlisī, Muḥammad-Bāqir,” *DMT*, 15:77–8.

109 Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 53:197. On *Biḥār al-anwār*, see Pampus, “Die theologische Enzyklopädie Biḥār al-Anwār”; Kohlberg, “Beḥār al-anwār,” *Elr*, 4:90–93; Tārimī, *Allāmah Majlisī*; Tārimī, “*Biḥār al-anwār*,” *DJI* (online). The volume on the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam was translated into Persian in 1260/1844 by Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan b. Muḥammad Valī Bik Afshār Bukshāvalī Urūmiyyih-ī (d. after 1260/1844), al-Ṭih-rānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, 16:76 (no. 383 under *Kitāb al-Ghayba*). On Urūmiyyih-ī, see al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i mawūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:17–8. This translation was published in the Qajar period, then again in 1329/1911 in Tehran, and in 1418/1997 in Qum. In the introduction, Urūmiyyih-ī dedicates the translation to Muḥammad Shāh, al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i mawūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:20–1. The same volume on the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam was retranslated into Persian by ‘Alī Davānī and extensively annotated with anti-Bahā’ī material. See al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i mawūd* (trans. Davānī).

110 This story is quoted in numerous other books. See e.g., al-Baḥrānī, *Kashkūl al-Baḥrānī aw-anīs al-musāfir wa-jalīs al-khātīr*, 110–2; Jalālī-‘Azīziyān, *Nigāh-i sabz*, 63–77; al-Badrī, *Gharā’ib al-akhbār*, 62–4; al-Ṣaffār al-Najafī, *Mawsūʿat al-imām*, 3:28–31; Faqīh, *Karāmāt al-imām al-mahdī*, 142–5; Faqīh, *Liqāʿāt al-‘ulamāʿ bi-l-imām al-ḥujja*, 124–7; ‘Ashūr, *Mawsūʿat ahl al-bayt*, 19:74–6. For English translation, see Dewji, *Imame Zaman Hazrat Mehdi*, 51–3. For Persian translation, see ‘Irāqī-Maythamī, *Dār al-salām*, 492–7 (no. 8); Bābā’ī, *Dāstānhā va karāmāt-i khāndanī*, 130–4.

111 For a discussion of some of the accounts mentioned in this chapter, see Ghaemmaghami, “Numinous Vision.” The bulk of the chapter is dedicated to the story of the Green Island in the White Sea. On this account, see Ghaemmaghami, “To the Abode of the Hidden One.”

Occultation. Al-Majlisī concluded that the final *tawqīʿ* did not preclude the possibility of seeing the Hidden Imam and receiving guidance from him during the Greater Occultation. Rather, the purpose of the final *tawqīʿ* was to abolish the institution of *sifāra* (“emissaryhood”) with the death of the fourth emissary, and thus, negate the appearance of any future special intermediary who could claim to know the Imam’s location and contact him at any time. Al-Majlisī argued that the trusted and pious believers, that is, the ulama, who by now constituted the general representatives (*al-nuwwāb al-ʿamma*) of the Imam, could see him, provided they did not advance any simultaneous claim to being the Imam’s authorized intermediary, a position that was reserved for the four *sufarāʾ* of the Lesser Occultation, who were recast as the Imam’s special representatives (*al-nuwwāb al-khāṣṣa*).¹¹² Al-Majlisī concluded,

Perhaps the last *tawqīʿ* was written for those who claim to be the Imam’s representative [and] to convey information to the Shīʿa [from the Imam], as was the case with the [four] *sufarāʾ* (“emissaries”), for if this were not the case, [the final *tawqīʿ*] would contradict the stories of those who have seen [the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation].¹¹³

112 On the distinction between *al-niyāba al-ʿamma* (general representation) and *al-niyāba al-khāṣṣa* (special representation) developed during the Safavid period, see Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, index, s.v. “*niyāba*”; Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 140, 142; Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam*, 50, 155, 190; Algar, “Iran ix (2.3),” *Elr*, 8:456–74; Anzali, “*Mysticism*” in *Iran*, 132.

113 Al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 52:151. Persian translation: al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i mawʿūd* (trans. Urūmiyyih-ī), 1:746; al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i mawʿūd* (trans. Davānī), 929. Over a century before al-Majlisī, al-Muqaddas al-Ardabilī (on whom, see below) also negotiated the tension between the final *tawqīʿ* and the stories of accounts during the Greater Occultation, two of which he mentions in a work that has been attributed to him titled *Ḥadīqat al-shīʿa*. After translating the final *tawqīʿ* of the Imam into Persian, al-Ardabilī states: “We have reconciled (*tawfiq*) [the tension] between hadiths like [the final *tawqīʿ*] and the accounts of those who have seen the Qāʾim during the Greater Occultation in our book [*al-Naṣṣ al-jalī fi imāmat mawlānā ʿAlī*]. Whoever wishes to know more about this issue should consult that book.” Ardabilī (attrib.), *Ḥadīqat al-shīʿa*, 2:990. Al-Ardabilī’s *al-Naṣṣ al-jalī fi imāmat mawlānā ʿAlī*, on which, see al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, 24:172 (no. 893), does not appear to have survived. Moreover, the editor of *Ḥadīqat al-shīʿa* points out that the sentence above is missing from an early manuscript of another work that cites extensively from *Ḥadīqat al-shīʿa*, including the passages that come directly before and after the above sentence. See Ardabilī, *Ḥadīqat al-shīʿa*, 2:990 n. 2. On the differing viewpoints that have been presented about the attribution of parts or all of *Ḥadīqat al-shīʿa* to al-Muqaddas al-Ardabilī, see Dhākīrī, “Nādurustī-yi intisāb.” Cf. Newman, “Sufism and Anti-Sufism in Safavid Iran: The Authorship of *Ḥadīqat al-Shīʿa* Revisited.”

After translating the *tawqīc* in his last completed work, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn dar uṣūl va furūʿ-i ʿitiqādāt* [The truth of certitude (Quran 56:95, 69:51) concerning the roots and branches of faith], an extensive Persian summary of the main tenets and doctrines of Shīʿī Islam,¹¹⁴ al-Majlisī makes the same argument, then adds,

Many trustworthy scholars (*thiqāt*)¹¹⁵ have narrated that they have seen [the Hidden Imam] during the Greater Occultation without having recognized him at the moment [of seeing him]. Therefore, it is possible that the intention of this hadith [that is, the final *tawqīc*] is that if they claim to see him and simultaneously recognize 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.¹¹⁶

Al-Majlisī also comments on the question of the well-known hadith of the sun and the clouds mentioned in chapter 1: “The sun can partially emerge from the clouds and when it does, one person may see it while another person does not. In the same way, during the days of his *ghayba*, [the Hidden Imam] may appear to some people and not to others.”¹¹⁷ Al-Majlisī provides the same explanation in *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, but then refers to two of the hadiths 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 (*khavāṣṣ-i shīʿiyyān-i ū*) would know his location, while during the second *ghayba*, only the privileged elite (*makhṣūṣān*) and

114 *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn* was completed one year before al-Majlisī's death and is said to have been the cause of the conversion of 70,000 Sunnis to Shīʿī Islam, though it is a stringently anti-Sunnī work. See Hairī, “Maḍjlisi, Mulla Muḥammad Bāqir,” *ER*², 5:1087; Brunner, “Majlesi, Moḥammad-Bāqer,” *Elr* (online), both of which cite a report from *Qīṣaṣ al-ʿulamāʾ* (completed in 1290/1873–4) by Muḥammad b. Sulaymān Tunkābunī (d. 1302/1885).

115 In works of hadith, *thiqāt* refers to ulama whose character is believed to be above reproach and who are therefore considered reliable in transmitting the hadiths of the Imams.

116 Al-Majlisī, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 316. For a different translation, see Amir-Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 162. In a separate work, al-Majlisī is said to have compiled and translated all of the *tawqīcāt* attributed to the Hidden Imam, see ʿAlī, *al-Mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 47. On al-Majlisī's decision to write several of his works in Persian, see Momen, *An Introduction to Shīʿī Islam*, 116.

117 [= *fa-kadhālik yumkin an yazhar fī ayyām ghaybatihī li-baʿḍ al-khalq dūn baʿḍ*] Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 52:94; Kawrānī, *Ḥawl ruʾyat al-mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 54; al-Shāhrūdī, *al-Imām al-Mahdī*, 176; Kohlberg, “Authoritative Scriptures,” 308–9. The metaphor has inspired the writing of a book by contemporary scholar Hādī al-Mūsawī titled *Shams al-imāma*.

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 makḥṣūṣān*) are perpetually in his service, that is, when one dies, another takes his place.¹¹⁸

Since his time al-Majlisī's opinion has served as the established position on the "lying impostor" passage of the final *tawqīf*, and it is mentioned or alluded to in most works that include stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam or deal with questions surrounding the *ghayba*.¹¹⁹ Yet not everyone is persuaded. In the early thirteenth/nineteenth century, Shaykh Ja'far al-Najafī, known as Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' (d. 1227/1812), the polemical champion of the Uṣūlī school and opponent of Mirzā Muḥammad al-Akḥbārī (d. 1232/1816–7), the leading exponent of the Akḥbārī cause in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century,¹²⁰ openly called into question the veracity of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam from the Greater Occultation, many of which were cited in works of Akḥbārī scholars.¹²¹ In his *al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn fī taṣwīb al-mujtahidīn wa-takḥīṭat juhhāl al-akḥbārīyyīn* (The conspicuous truth in vindicating the Mujtahids [that is, the Uṣūlīs] and refuting the ignorant among the Akḥbārīs), Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' denounces Shī'ī scholars before him—and in particular, "unenlightened" Akḥbārīs—for, among other things, their indiscriminate use of hadiths and uncritical reliance on strange stories and narrations.¹²² To make his point, he adduces the story of the Green Island in the White Sea, recorded by al-Majlisī in *Bihār al-anwār* and by a host of scholars before and after al-Majlisī. Kāshif

118 Al-Majlisī, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 345–6. Cf. the discussion of the substituted friends of God known as the *abdāl* above.

119 See appendix II.

120 On Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' and his role in opposing the Akḥbārīs, see Algar, "Kāṣef al-ḡeṭā'," *Elr* (online); Madelung, "Kāshif al-Ghiṭā'," *EI*², 4:703; Halm, *Shī'ism*, 97; Kohlberg, "Aspects of Akḥbari Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," 152; Momen, *An Introduction to Shī'ī Islam*, 135–6, 191. On the Akḥbārī-Uṣūlī divide, see Stewart, "The Genesis of the Akḥbārī Revival"; Kohlberg, "Akḥbārīya," *Elr*, 1:716–8; Gleave, "Akḥbārīyya and Uṣūlīyya," *EI*³ (online); Litvak, "Iraq xi.," *Elr*, 13:588–99. On Muḥammad al-Akḥbārī, see Algar, "Akḥbārī, Mirzā Moḥammad," *Elr*, 1:716.

121 See, e.g., al-Kāshānī (d. ca. 1091/1680), *Nawādīr al-akḥbār*, 300–5 (no. 2); al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt al-hudā*, 5:335–6 (no. 159); H. al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1695–96 or 1109/1697–98), *Tabṣīrat al-walī* (on this work, see Appendix I); al-Jazā'irī (d. 1112/1701), *Rīyāḍ al-abrār*, 3:135–45; Y. al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1773), *Kashkūl al-Baḥrānī*, 98–108.

122 On this work, see Algar, "Kāṣef al-ḡeṭā'," *Elr* (online); Rajabī, *ʿUlamā-yi mujāhid*, 381; al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharʿa*, 7:37–8 (no. 190). Al-Ṭīhrānī points out that Mirzā Muḥammad al-Akḥbārī promptly wrote a response to *al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn* called *al-Ṣayḥa bi-l-ḥaqq ʿalā man alḥada wa-tazandaqa* (The cry for truth against the one who abandoned his faith and became a heretic), but this work does not appear to have survived.

al-Ghiṭā' accuses al-Majlisī, al-Akhbārī, and Akhbārī-leaning scholars of transmitting stories from unreliable sources. He is incredulous at what he considers an overly lax attitude on the part of these scholars toward the final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam and other hadiths that he does not identify (though it seems, in all likelihood, that he is referring to the hadiths discussed in chapter 1): "It is as if they have never seen the hadiths affirming that no one can see [the Imam] during the Greater Occultation and refuse to follow the words of the ulama who have affirmed this [to be the truth]."¹²³ In this regard, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' rebukes Akhbārī scholars for their "strange, improbable accounts (*al-aqwāl al-ʿajība*) and bizarre, varnished falsehoods (*al-muzakhrāfāt al-gharība*) that not even an ignoramus would dream of publishing, let alone the sane of mind."¹²⁴

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 hadiths [of the *ahl al-bayt*] concerning the principles [of religion]) that stories of reputed contact with the Imam during the Greater Occultation are inconsistent with the doctrine of the Imam's concealment (*yunāfi l-ghayba*) and cannot be substantiated by rational or traditional proofs.¹²⁵ Other Shīʿī scholars in recent years have likewise rejected outright the stories of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, frequently citing the final *tawqīʿ* of the Imam and restating the view of early traditionists like al-Nuʿmānī and al-Ṣadūq.¹²⁶

The tension between the stories of encounters with the Imam and the final *tawqīʿ* of the Imam is perhaps best illustrated in an account transmitted about Muḥammad Mahdī b. Murtaḍā al-Burūjirdī l-Ṭabāṭabāʿī, known as Baḥr al-

123 [= *wa-ka-annahu lam yara al-akhbār al-dālla ʿalā ʿadam wuqūʿ al-ruʿya min aḥādīn baʿd al-ghayba al-kubrā ... wa-lā tatbaʿ kalimāt al-ʿulamāʿ al-dālla ʿalā dhālik*] Kāshif al-Ghiṭā', *al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn*, fol. 87. Muḥammad-ʿAlī Qāḍī Ṭabāṭabāʿī (d. 1358 Sh./1979) cites Kāshif al-Ghiṭā's statement in the margins of al-Jazāʿirī, *al-Anwār*, 2:64 n. 1. The Persian translation of this statement is cited in Dhākīrī, "Irtibāṭ bā imām-i zamān," 96; Ṭabasī, "Jazīrih-yi khaḍrā." See also Amir-Moezzi, "Contribution à la Typologie," 131 n. 80. Kāshif al-Ghiṭā's criticism of the Akhbāris foreshadowed the disapproval (some two centuries later) of Aya-tollah Khumaynī and other Uṣūlī jurists who used the term Akhbārī "only as a pejorative label to designate the apolitical, 'stagnant,' and 'superstitious' orientation of those clerics who [did] not subscribe to the politicized and ideological Islam of the militant '*ulamāʿ*,'" Amir Arjomand, "Ideological Revolution in Shi'ism," 196.

124 Kāshif al-Ghiṭā', *al-Ḥaqq al-mubīn*, fol. 88.

125 Āl ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Hady al-ʿuqūl*, 9:113. On Āl ʿAbd al-Jabbār, a student of Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʿī and al-Waḥīd al-Bihbihānī, see *Hady al-ʿuqūl*, 1:1–22.

126 See, for example, al-Tustarī, *al-Akhbār al-dakhīla*, 128; al-Düzdüzānī, *Tahqīq laṭīf*; Dhākīrī, "Irtibāṭ bā imām-i zamān."

‘Ulūm (“the ocean of knowledge”) (d. 1212/1797), a leading Shī‘ī scholar and early luminary of the revived Uṣūlī school of Shī‘ī jurisprudence, by one of his students:

I was present that day in ‘Allāma al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī Baḥr al-‘Ulūm’s class. As he smoked his water pipe, someone asked whether or not it is possible to see the comely countenance [of the Hidden Imam] during the Greater Occultation. [Baḥr al-‘Ulūm] 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 repudiate anyone who claims to see him during his occultation?” He repeated these words under his breath several times. Finally, he answered the questioner: “The hadiths 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.¹²⁷

Despite the few voices of protest, al-Majlisī’s interpretation of the final *tawqīf* opened the floodgates. Two of al-Majlisī’s contemporaries, Mīr Lawḥī (fl. eleventh/seventeenth century) and Hāshim al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1695–96 or 1109/1697–98), wrote books, after the completion of volume 13 of al-Majlisī’s *Bihār al-anwār*, that refer to accounts of meetings with the Imam during the Greater Occultation.¹²⁸ In addition, one of al-Majlisī’s most gifted students Abū l-Ḥasan Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-‘Āmilī al-Futūnī, known as al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī (d. ca. 1139/1726–27), followed in his master’s footsteps in writing *Ḍiyā’ al-‘ālamīn* [or *al-‘ālamayn*] *fī bayān imāmat al-a’imma al-muṣṭafīn* (The light of the worlds [or the two worlds (i.e., earth and heaven)] in explicating the imamate of the chosen Imams).¹²⁹ Al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī maintained that there are “many credible reports” (*al-manqūlāt al-mu’tabara ... kathīra jiddan*) of those who, near his own time, saw the Hidden Imam.¹³⁰ He refers or alludes to the stories men-

127 Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma’wā*, 51–2 (account no. 10); al-Ḥā’irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 2:23–4 (no. 12). Persian translation: al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:727 (no. 74).

128 See appendix I, nos. 8 and 10.

129 On al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, see Corbin, “Āmelī Eṣfahānī,” *Elr*, 1:931–2; Lawson, “Akḥbārī Shī‘ī Approaches to *tafsīr*,” 195–201; Amir-Moezzi, “al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, Abū l-Ḥasan,” *ET*³ (online).

130 Al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḍiyā’ al-‘ālamīn*, 5:248. His words are cited by al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma’wā*, 95; al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:694; and Kawrānī, *Ḥawl ru’yat al-mahdī l-muntaẓār*, 55 (via al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī).

tioned by al-Majlisī in the above-mentioned chapter of al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār* entitled "Rare are the accounts of those who have seen [the Hidden Imam] during the Greater Occultation close to our time," including the story of the Green Island in the White Sea.¹³¹ He accuses anyone who rejects these stories of suffering from "pure bigotry" (*maḥḍ al-ʿaṣabiyya*).¹³²

In the centuries that followed, scholars cited, and continue to cite, al-Majlisī's explanation of the final *tawqīʿ* to justify their work of compiling and publishing collections of accounts of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, in particular as a means of responding to competing claims of authority advanced by "heterodox" movements. This was the main motivating force behind the encyclopedic collections of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam from the Greater Occultation published by the late thirteenth/nineteenth-century scholar Maḥmūd b. Jaʿfar al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī (d. 1306/1888–9, 1308/1890–1 or 1310/1892–3), the sedulous traditionalist Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, and several of the latter's prolific students.¹³³ It is noteworthy that al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī's Arabic collection of encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation, titled *Jannat al-maʿwā*, has been appended, since the late nineteenth century, to the volume of al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār* that deals with the life, occultation, and return of the Hidden Imam, thus giving the impression that such encounters have always been a part of the story of the Hidden Imam.¹³⁴

In some accounts of encounters, the Imam no longer simply cures seemingly incurable ailments or helps groups of Shīʿa threatened by highwaymen, as some of the earlier stories relate. Rather, he is transformed or, most aptly, returns as the source of religious knowledge for his representatives, the ulama.¹³⁵

131 Al-ʿAmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḍiyāʿ al-ʿālamīn*, 5:244–9.

132 Al-ʿAmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḍiyāʿ al-ʿālamīn*, 5:249.

133 See Ghaemmaghami, "The Abode of Peace"; Ghaemmaghami, "Arresting the Eschaton." The most comprehensive biography of al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, by Yāsīn al-Mūsawī, can be found in al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *al-Najm al-thāqib* (trans. al-Mūsawī), 15–112. See also, Ṭālīʿī, *Az nūr tā nūr: Allāmiḥ Muḥaddith-i-Nūrī*; Iʿtimād al-Salṭaniḥ, *ʿUlamā-yi*, 77–9; Daryābigī, "Muḥaddith-i Nūrī," *DMT*, 15:101. On the collections of al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī, al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, and al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī's students, see appendix 1. In addition to collecting stories of encounters with the Imam, al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī also called into question the veracity of the final *tawqīʿ* of the Imam. For his argument and a response to it, see al-Khazrajī, *Sufarāʾ al-mahdī*, 256–9.

134 Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 53:199–336.

135 In a popular work, *Rāḥī bistī-y-i nūr pīrāmūn-i irtibāt-i rūḥī bā imām-i zamān*, 3,000 copies of which were printed in its tenth printing, the author recounts several stories of contact with the Hidden Imam and avers that the path to the Imam is open; the Shīʿa must refer to "the godly ulama" who have connected (*muttaṣil*) themselves with the "Imam of the

The stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam are adduced as one of the main proofs, if not the main proof, of the Imam's continued existence.¹³⁶ In speaking about his collections of encounter stories, al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, for example, 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 *Najm-i thāqib*. We mentioned so many proofs and evidences [i.e., stories of encounters with the Imam] that not a trace of doubt exists about [this matter]."¹³⁷ 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,"¹³⁸ al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī and other compilers have sought to consolidate the faith of believers, draw them closer to the Hidden Imam, and strengthen the authority and charisma of the ulama. Additionally, the narratives compiled by these scholars often serve 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-Shī'ī Muslims and non-Muslims), and any group that challenges the authority of the ulama or ruptures the eschatological tension caused by the *ghayba*, such as groups founded by individuals who claimed to be the Mahdī or his representative.¹³⁹

Most of the stories employ the same topoi and follow a similar cadence. One of the largest collections is Muḥammad-Riḍā Bāqī-Iṣfahānī's *Ināyāt-i ḥaḍrat-i mahdī bih 'ulamā' va ṭullāb* (The manifold favors of the Mahdī to ulama and students of the Shī'ī seminary), which contains 218 accounts, divided into twenty-six chapters with the following headings:

1. The Imam responds to questions posed by ulama [accounts 1–8]
2. The Imam provides guidance to the ulama in specific cases [accounts 9–23]
3. The Imam teaches prayers [accounts 24–30]

Age," inasmuch as they reflect the light of God, by which is meant the light of the Imams. Ni'matī, *Rāhī bisūy-i nūr*, 268.

136 See for example, Gulpāyigānī, *Navīd-i amn va-amān*, 290–1; Gulpāyigānī, *Iṣḥālat-i mahdāvīyyat*, 55–70; Āl Muḥsin, *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn*, 326–7.

137 Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Khātimat mustadrak al-wasā'il*, 3:229.

138 Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, 11.

139 For example, the Ni'matullāhī Sufi order holds that the spiritual leader of the order, as the "special representative" of the Hidden Imam, is in direct contact with the Imam. See Scharbrodt, "The *quṭb* as Special Representative of the Hidden Imam." On similar claims among Sufi groups, see van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes*, 46, 59–60, 86–7, 92, 217, 222. For an account of some individuals who claimed to be the Mahdī, especially in the years between 1979 and 2004, see al-Sāda, *al-Nūr al-ghā'ib*, 129 ff.

4. The Imam corrects prayers [accounts 31–33]
5. The Imam encourages the ulama to pursue knowledge [accounts 34–37]
6. The Imam protects and defends the ulama [accounts 38–43]
7. The Imam appoints “sources of emulation” (*marāji‘ al-taqlid*) to serve as his agents [accounts 44–54]
8. The Imam appoints instructors [accounts 55–57]
9. General commands issued by the Imam [accounts 58–69]
10. The Imam commands the writing of a book [accounts 70–73]
11. The Imam warns the ulama [accounts 74–80]
12. The healing of illnesses through the blessings of the Imam [accounts 81–95]
13. Ultimatums [accounts 96–101]
14. The Imam provides stipends to seminary students [accounts 102–109]
15. The Imam gives cash gifts to ulama and seminary students [accounts 110–123]
16. The Imam provides non-cash gifts to ulama and seminary students [accounts 124–126]
17. The Imam provides special gifts to ulama and seminary students [accounts 127–134]
18. The Imam fulfills wishes and alleviates the problems of ulama and seminary students [accounts 135–141]
19. The Imam exalts the faith [= Islam] and glorifies the places of worshipping God [accounts 142–145]
20. The Shi‘a are saved through the blessings of the Imam [accounts 146–152]
21. The ulama are saved from the hands of wrongdoers through the blessings of the Imam [accounts 153–163]
22. The ulama are saved from death through the blessings of the Imam [accounts 164–168]
23. The Imam visits ulama and seminary students who are sick [accounts 169–172]
24. The Imam participates in funeral services [accounts 173–179]
25. The ulama witness the beauty of the Imam [accounts 180–204]
26. The Imam rescues ulama who have lost their way [accounts 205–218]

In the following section, I will mention four representative examples of prominent ulama who are said to have encountered the Imam during the Greater Occultation.

(1) ‘Allama al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325): As noted, 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 accompanies al-Ḥillī from al-Ḥilla to Karbala. Al-Ḥillī poses a number of legal questions to his companion, all of which he ably answers. The stranger goes so far as to mention a hadith, of which al-Ḥillī was unaware, citing the book, page number, and line where the hadith occurs. (Al-Ḥillī, it is said, later finds the hadith in the exact location the stranger mentioned.) Al-Ḥillī then asks him whether or not the Imam can be seen during the Greater Occultation (showing once again the critical nature of this question). Just then, his whip falls to the ground. As the stranger bends to pick up the whip and hand it to al-Ḥillī, he reveals himself to be the Hidden Imam and disappears.¹⁴⁰ In the second account, it is said that an unnamed Sunnī scholar had written a polemical book against the Shīʿa, to which al-Ḥillī wished to respond. Through dissimulating his faith, al-Ḥillī is able to beguile the Sunnī scholar into loaning him the book for one night in order to read and copy it, so that he may write a response. Yet al-Ḥillī falls asleep midway through the night. The Imam appears (either in a dream or while al-Ḥillī is awake, the text is unclear) and tells al-Ḥillī that he himself will copy the book—a task that would have taken al-Ḥillī almost a year to complete. The next morning, the book is fully copied.¹⁴¹

140 See Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i ʿaṣr*, 176–7, who gives as his source, Muḥammad b. al-Amīr al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī al-Ḥāʾirī (d. 1242/1826), *Mafātīḥ al-uṣūl wa-manāhil al-fiqh*. On *Mafātīḥ al-uṣūl wa-manāhil al-fiqh*, on which see al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, 21:300 (no. 5173). Al-Ṭīhrānī claims to have seen the account in al-Ḥillī's own handwriting on the margins of one of al-Ḥillī's books. I am unable to verify this claim. The account is also cited in Ishtihārdī, "Guzārī bar zindigī-i 'Allāmah Ḥillī," 22–4; al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 506–9 (from Tunkābunī's (d. 1302/1885) *Qīṣaṣ al-ʿulamāʾ*); Jaʿfarī, *Dīdār dar ʿaṣr-i ghaybat* 313–4 (from Tunkābunī); al-Mūsawī, *al-Liqāʾ al-mahdawī*, 144 (from Tunkābunī); al-Mūsawī, *Shams al-imāma*, 429. 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-Ḥādī ʿAshar* (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 traveled 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 al-Ḥusayn and the Hidden Imam. See al-Ṣaffār al-Najafī, *Mawsūʿat al-imām*, 3:77–80; Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, 426, 463; Rahnema, *Superstition as Ideology*, 175.

141 See al-Shūshtarī, *Majālis al-muʾminīn*, 1:573 (on this work, see Rizvi, "Shīʿī Polemics," 56); al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-maʿwā*, 69–70 (no. 22), who concludes that the encounter took place in a dream; al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqīb*, 346–7 (no. 15); Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i ʿaṣr*, 179–80; Dhākīrī, "Irtibāṭ bā imām-i zamān," 101; al-Mūsawī, *al-Arbaʿūn fi l-mahdī*, 42; Ishtihārdī, "Guzārī bar zindigī-i 'Allāmah Ḥillī," 24–5; ʿAlīpūr, *Jībvaḥḥāy-i pinhānī-i imām-i ʿaṣr*, 130–1 (from al-Shūshtarī's *Majālis al-muʾminīn*); Faqīh, *Liqaʾāt al-ʿulamāʾ*, 224–5; Faqīh, *Manāmāt al-ʿulamāʾ*, 130–1; al-Mūsawī, *al-Liqāʾ al-mahdawī*, 242–3; Jalālī-ʿAzizīyān, *Niqāḥ-i Sabz*, 7–14; al-Mūsawī, *Shams al-imāma*, 430; Kohlberg, "Authoritative Scripture," 309. Cf. al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqīb*, 2:531–2 (no. 15), who cites a different version of this story

(2) Al-Muḥaqqiq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ardabīlī, known as al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī (d. 993/1585),¹⁴² was 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.”¹⁴³ His epithet, Muqaddas (meaning holy), is said to refer to the many miraculous stories that have been narrated about him.¹⁴⁴ In a frequently cited account, one of his students secretly follows him one night from the shrine of Imam ‘Alī in Najaf to the central mosque in Kufa.¹⁴⁵ The student watches as al-Ardabīlī spends an extended period of time at the mosque’s *miḥrāb*, where Imam ‘Alī was fatally wounded. Al-Ardabīlī then leaves the mosque and returns to Najaf. When the student confronts al-Ardabīlī about what he has seen, al-Ardabīlī reveals the following, on condition that the student not divulge what he shares with anyone as long as al-Ardabīlī is alive. Al-Ardabīlī confides that he was grappling with a number of questions (*masā’il*, a term that refers in this context to theological or legal questions) that he was unable to answer. It occurred to him to visit the shrine of Imam ‘Alī and present his questions to the Imam. In the shrine, he was instructed by a voice that issued from the sepulcher to proceed to the mosque of Kufa and pose his questions to the Imam of the Age at the mosque’s *miḥrāb*. He did so, and his questions were answered. Al-Ardabīlī thus indicates that he encountered the Hidden Imam at the *miḥrāb* and received answers to his questions.¹⁴⁶

from the *Kashkūl* of a certain ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Māzandarānī, a contemporary of al-Majlisī. In Māzandarānī’s version, the stranger who assists al-Ḥillī in copying the book is simply described as someone resembling the people of Hijaz. There is no mention or allusion to the stranger being the Hidden Imam. For an Arabic translation, see al-Mūsawī, *al-Liqā’ al-mahdawī*, 243.

142 On al-Ardabīlī, see Madelung, “Ardabīlī,” *Elr*, 2:368–70; Fānī, “Muqaddas-i Ardabīlī,” *DMT*, 15:453–4; Momen, *An Introduction to Shī‘i Islam*, 311.

143 Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shī‘i Law*, 51.

144 This epithet conjures up the location of the Hidden Imam which, as noted previously, is often called “the sacred region” (*al-nāḥiya al-muqaddasa*).

145 The Great Mosque of Kufa is one of the oldest and most famous mosques in the world. According to some hadiths, it will serve as the seat of power for the awaited Qā‘im. See Khudābandihlū, “Masjid-i Kūfah,” *DMT*, 15:294–6.

146 The account is cited in al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 52:174–5, who states that he heard it from a number of people who heard it from al-Ardabīlī’s student, a certain Amīr ‘Allām. Also cited in al-Baḥrānī, *Kashkūl al-Baḥrānī*, 108–9; al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:694–6 (account no. 63), who cites as his source al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī’s *Ḍiyā’ al-‘ālamīn*, who cites it from al-Jazā‘irī’s (d. 1112/1700–1) (a student of al-Majlisī) *al-Anwār al-nu‘māniyya*. On the same pages, al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī provides a second version of the story (from a different source) that is similar to the first version. The first version of the account is also cited or referred to in Ardabīlī (attrib.), *Ḥadiqat al-shī‘a*², dāl (from the publisher’s introduction); al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 497–9 (no. 9; Persian translation of *Bihār al-anwār*); al-Ḥā‘irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 2:42–3 (from *Bihār al-anwār*); Nahā-

(3) The aforementioned Baḥr al-ʿUlūm (d. 1212/1797) is alleged by his students and later ulama to have been favored with several miraculous encounters with the Hidden Imam.¹⁴⁷ When asked by Mīrzā Abū l-Qāsim al-Qummī (d. 1231/1816), author of the influential legal work *al-Qawānīn al-muḥkama fī l-uṣūl*,¹⁴⁸ how he became so knowledgeable, Baḥr al-ʿUlūm responded that he would tell him on the condition that he did not disclose the secret to anyone. He proceeded to credit an encounter with the Imam who transferred “knowledge, holiness, inspiration, and learning” (*al-ʿilm wa-l-qudsiyya wa-l-waḥy wa-l-faḍl*) to his heart by embracing him inside the central mosque in Kufa.¹⁴⁹

(4) Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī (d. 1281/1864) was the first universally recognized “source of emulation” (*marjʿ al-taqlīd*), a title of the supreme Shīʿī jurist and highest religious authority. He was also the founder of a new school of Shīʿī law that still predominates today.¹⁵⁰ According to an account transmitted by a student,

vandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i ʿaṣr*, 72; ʿAlīpūr, *Jilvahhāy-i pinhānī-i imām-i ʿaṣr*, 131–3 (from al-Jazāʾirī, *al-Anwār*); Kawrānī, *Ḥawl ruʿyat al-mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 51; al-Mūsawī, *al-Liqāʾ al-mahdawī*, 144; al-Jahrumī, *Riʾāyat al-imām al-mahdī*, 75–6; Faqīh, *Karāmāt al-imām al-mahdī*, 110 (citing Ḥasan Abṭāḥī as his source); al-Badrī, *Gharāʾib al-akhbār*, 71–2; al-Ṣaffār al-Najafī, *Mawsūʿat al-imām*, 3:137; Bābāʾī, *Dāstānḥā va karāmāt-i khāndanī*, 67–8. See also Amir-Moezzi, “Visions d’Imams,” 103.

147 On Baḥr al-ʿUlūm, see Algar, “Baḥr-al-ʿOlūm,” *Elr*, 3:504; Gleave, “Baḥr al-ʿUlūm, Muḥammad Mahdī al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī,” *ER*³ (online); al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Khātimat mustadrak al-wasāʾil*, 2:45.

148 On al-Mīrzā al-Qummī, see al-Amīn, *Aʿyān al-shīʿa*, 2:411–3.

149 Faqīh, *Karāmāt al-imām al-mahdī*, 109–10 (citing Abṭāḥī as his source). As Amir-Moezzi, “Visions d’Imams,” 103, notes about him, “l’immensité de sa science et ses nombreux pouvoirs miraculeux étaient, selon ces sources en grande partie dus à ses expériences de contacts suprasensibles avec les imams [especially, the Hidden Imam].” See also Anzālī, “Mysticism” in *Iran*, 167 n. Other sources that have transmitted accounts of Baḥr al-ʿUlūm’s encounters with the Imam include al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:727 (no. 74); al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-maʿwā*, 51–2 (no. 10); al-Ḥāʾirī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 2:23–4 (no. 12); al-Jahrumī, *Riʾāyat al-imām al-mahdī*, 90; ʿAlī, *Baḥr al-ʿUlūm*, 82–6; al-Mūsawī, *al-Arbaʿūn fī l-mahdī*, 28, 29, 63–4, 126, 185–6, 27; Faqīh, *Karāmāt al-imām al-mahdī*, 81–2; al-Bahrānī and al-Marzūq, *Mawsūʿat al-qīṣaṣ wa-l-ḥikāyā*, 138–9; Jalālī-ʿAzīziyān, *Nigāh-i sabz*, 221–3; al-Ṣaffār al-Najafī, *Mawsūʿat al-imām*, 3:56–8.

150 On him, see Murata, “Anṣārī, Shaikh Mortazā b. Moḥammad Amīn,” *Elr*, 2:102–103; Modarressi, *An Introduction to Shīʿī Law*, 57; Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, s.v. index “Ansari, Sheikh Mortaza”; Cole, “Imami Jurisprudence”; Litvak, *Shīʿī Scholars*, passim; Momen, *An Introduction to Shīʿī Islam*, 311; Heern, *Shīʿī Law and Leadership*; al-Anṣārī, *al-Shaykh Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī*. On the title and function of the “source of emulation,” see Calmard, “Mardjāʿ-i Taqlīd,” *ER*²; Kazemi-Moussavi, “The Struggle for Authority in the Nineteenth Century;” Shīʿite Community Kazemi-Moussavi, “The Institutionalization of Marjāʿ-i Taqlīd.”

he used to leave his home in Najaf in the middle of the night and meet the Imam at his home—the location of which only al-Anṣārī knew. In an account that resembles the above-mentioned story of al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī, when al-Anṣārī was confronted, one night, by his student who was following him, he 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-Ardabīlī, al-Anṣārī makes his student swear an oath to keep what he has told him a secret as long as al-Anṣārī is alive.¹⁵¹

The direct contact with the Hidden Imam described in these accounts (including knowing his location) parallels the accounts of encounters from the Lesser Occultation. As I showed, in the earliest Greater Occultation accounts, the Imam was portrayed predominantly as a consoler, healer, miracle worker, and savior of those in danger. 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 last emissary and the start of the Greater Occultation, in what I argue is an attempt to portray the Greater Occultation as a natural and uncomplicated extension of the Lesser Occultation. Not enough is yet known about Shīʿī Islam in the late Abbasid period to draw definitive conclusions as to why such accounts begin to appear at this time, especially in the works of Ibn Tāwūs. The fall of Abbasid caliphate may 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 significantly heightened messianic susceptibilities. In this light, it is possible to read Ibn Tāwūs'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, it was only in the Safavid and Qajar periods that the accounts became more embellished and the Imam

151 Al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 511–2 (no. 17). Al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī was himself a student of al-Anṣārī. He states that he heard this account from another student Mirzā Ḥasan Āshtiyānī. The account is also mentioned in Anṣārī-Ahwāz, *Zindigānī va-shakhṣiyyat-i Shaykh Anṣārī*, 106–7; Anṣārī, *Shaykh-i Aʿzam-i Anṣārī*, 57–8; Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i ʿaṣr*, 177–8; ʿAlīpūr, *Jilvahhāy-i pinhānī-i imām-i ʿaṣr*, 134–5; al-Mūsawī, *al-Arbaʿūn fi l-mahdī*, 30–1 (from Ḥasan Abṭāḥī's *al-Kamālāt al-rūhiyya*); Faqīh, *Liḡāʾat al-ʿulamāʾ*, 145–6; Jalālī-ʿAzīziyān, *Nigāh-i sabz*, 54–7; al-Ṣaffār al-Najafī, *Mawsūʿat al-imām*, 3:139. For a similar account of al-Anṣārī secretly meeting the Hidden Imam in Karbala, see Bāqī-İsfahānī, *ʿInāyāt-i ḥaḍrat-i baqīyat Allāh*, 139–41. In another story, in a dream, an Arab is told by Imam ʿAlī to seek guidance from al-Anṣārī. See Bābāʿī, *Dāstānhā va karāmāt-i khāndanī*, 70.

was transformed, in effect, from being primarily a miracle worker to a teacher, scholar, and recourse for the ulama to strengthen their influence as the Imam's "general representatives."

The dominance of the Uṣūlī school and the emergence of a hierarchy of *mujtahids* (Muslim scholars who formulate decisions in legal or theological matters) in the Qajar period created an atmosphere of intolerance for alternative thought. The revival of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam in the thirteenth/nineteenth century also coincided with the emergence of the Bābī movement. It is perhaps not surprising that most of the ulama who compiled narratives of encounters with the Imam also wrote scathing attacks denouncing the Shaykhī and Bābī movements, not to mention Sufis. These scholars lived at a time in which many of the eschatological tensions regarding the occultation of the Hidden Imam—tensions that had remained unresolved since the Lesser Occultation—exploded onto the Shī'ī religious landscape.

Conclusion

In late 2003, Ayatollah ‘Alī Mishkīnī (d. 2007) saw 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, at the time, one of the most influential ulama in the country’s clerical oligarchy, described how, seven months earlier, angels presented the Imam 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. Mishkīnī’s statement came on the heels of a parliamentary election marked by controversy. In the run-up to the election, most reformist candidates were disqualified by a peremptory ban issued by twelve jurists that compose Iran’s supreme legislative body, the Guardian Council. The implication of Mishkīnī’s claim was not lost. He was privy to the will of the Hidden Imam, namely, that only allies of the clerical conservatives could serve in parliament. The public disclosure of Mishkīnī’s statement garnered the attention of national and international press agencies. Mishkīnī later attempted to qualify his remarks, but only after they were criticized by other government officials.¹

In an ethnographic study based on extensive field research, Swedish anthropologist David Thurfjell observed that while Iran’s current supreme leader Ayatollah ‘Alī Khāmīnī (b. 1939) has never made such a claim publicly, 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 Imam Mahdi himself.”²

1 See Jamshīd Barzugar, “Namāyandigān-i majlis: muntakhabān-i mardum yā mansūbīn-i imām-i zamān?” (Members of Parliament: Elected by the People or Appointed by the Imam of the Age?), BBC Persian.com, 13 June 2004, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2004/06/040613_v-meshkiniremarks.shtml; Shahi, “Paradoxes of Iranian Messianic Politics,” 119. It has long been alleged that the Imam offers support for political change through appearing to ulama. During the constitutional movement, the influential “source of emulation” (*marjī‘ al-taqlīd*) Ayatollah Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Nā‘īnī (d. 1936), one of the famous advocates of constitutionalism among the Shī‘ī clerics, claimed that the Hidden Imam appeared to him in a dream and voiced support for a constitutional form of government. Brunner, “Le charisma des songeurs,” 110. Cf. The prominent anti-Constitutionalist cleric Faḍl Allāh Nūrī (d. 1909) is also said to have compiled a collection of stories of prominent clerics who encountered the Hidden Imam. See Mundhīr, *Tanhā-yi shakībā*, 185.

2 Thurfjell, *Living Shī‘ism*, 163. In an audio recording that has been transcribed, Ayatollah

Indeed, stories of encounters with the Imam have been attributed to many of the famous and influential Shī'ī clerics of the twentieth century, such as Ayatollah Shihāb al-Dīn Mar'ashī-Najafī (d. 1990)³ and the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Rūḥ Allāh Khumaynī (d. 1989).⁴ During the Iran-Iraq War, a rumor spread that the Hidden Imam was seen on the horizon in major battles, leading the troops.⁵ In 2006, reports that the influential Iraqi militia leader Muqtadā al-Ṣadr (b. 1973) was in intimate contact with the Hidden Imam were not denied by his office.⁶ In June 2009, the prominent Ayatollah Abū l-Qāsim Khaz'alī (d. 2015), a former member of the Guardian Council, told his son, Mahdī Khaz'alī (b. 1965), that he received a letter from the "sacred precinct" of the Hidden Imam commissioning him to defend Maḥmūd Aḥmadīnizhād (b. 1956) in the controversial 2009 Iranian presidential election.⁷ Others have gone even further and claimed, based on their visions of the Hidden Imam, to

Mahdī Aḥadī (b. 1962–3) recounts another story of Ayatollah Khāmini'ī meeting the Hidden Imam. See Mahdī Aḥadī, "Tasharruf-i Ayatollah Khāmini'ī bih maḥḍar-i mubārak-i ḥadrat-i mahdī" (Ayatollah Khāmini'ī attains the blessed presence of the Mahdī), Salehat.ir, 19 August 2010, <http://salehat.ir/index.php/97-khamenei/agma-va-mahdi/54-1389-05-28-12-48-16>. Ayatollah Khāmini'ī's official website states that there are some "who are lucky enough and have the capacity sometimes [to] meet [the Hidden Imam] without recognizing him." "Who is Imam Mahdi? Is he the Savior promised by all religions?", Khamenei.ir, 17 August 2008, http://english.khamenei.ir/Opinions/Imam_mahdi.

- 3 Four stories of his encounters with the Imam are recorded in Kawrānī (ed.), *Karāmāt Ayatollah*, 97–112.
- 4 Kawrānī, *al-Karāmāt al-ghaybiyya*, 82. For example, in 1973–4, while he was in prison, Ayatollah Ḥā'irī-Shīrāzī claimed to have dreamt of Ayatollah Khumaynī delivering a sermon. In the dream, a man entered while he was speaking and Ayatollah Khumaynī cried out that the man was the Hidden Imam and asked him for assistance. The next day, Ayatollah Ḥā'irī-Shīrāzī began to receive better treatment from the prison guards and later learned that on the night of his dream, Ayatollah Khumaynī had prayed to the Hidden Imam for his protection. See Kawrānī, *al-Karāmāt al-ghaybiyya*, 73–4. Another cleric Shaykh Māzandariyān, who did not trust Ayatollah Khumaynī and refused to attend his classes in Qum, dreamt of the Hidden Imam whispering to Ayatollah Khumaynī and remarked that they were the same height. He awoke with a realization of the station of Ayatollah Khumaynī in the eyes of the Hidden Imam. See Kawrānī, *al-Karāmāt al-ghaybiyya*, 75–8; Hage Ali, *Nationalism*, 158.
- 5 Amanat, *Iran*, 838. See also Cook, "Waiting for the Twelfth Imam," 130.
- 6 Visser, "The Sadrist," 121, citing an unpublished paper by Amatzia Baram titled "Muqtada al-Sadr, the Mahdi and Shi'ī Messianic Expectations."
- 7 The personal website of Mahdī Khaz'alī, 18 June 2009, <http://www.drkhazali.com/articles-and-mails/572-1388-03-28-18-48-48.html#> (site discontinued). On the upsurge of messianic fervor in Iran during the presidency of Maḥmūd Aḥmadīnizhād and in the Middle East generally, see the references provided in Kazemzadeh, "Foreign Policy Decision Making," 213, nn. 44–5; Cook, "Messianism in the Shiite Crescent."

be his messenger or representative.⁸ Still others who hold views inimical to the Iranian government and have claimed, albeit indirectly, that they have seen the Imam, have been jailed or marginalized.⁹

The proliferation of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam and their publication in Lebanon as part of Hizbullah's propaganda initiatives have been documented and analyzed.¹⁰ Numerous books have appeared with chapters outlining what believers can do to attain the Imam's presence.¹¹ One writer particularly interested in the accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam, the author of *Kayfa taltaqī bi-l-imām al-mahdī* (How you can meet Imam Mahdī), maintains that most ulama in the contemporary period affirm that seeing the Hidden Imam in the Greater Occultation is possible.¹² He goes on claim that "the same rate [of appearances of the Hidden Imam] in the Lesser Occultation reoccurs in one form or another in the Greater Occultation. And all of this is, God willing, unquestionable."¹³ The same argument is advanced by numerous other writers, including contemporary Shī'ī scholars in Iran¹⁴ and Bahrain.¹⁵ Thus has the Greater Occultation been construed as a natural extension of the Lesser Occultation, the "lying impostor" passage of the final *tawqī'* been explained away, and a tradition gradually "invented" and consolidated is now being presented as "unquestionable."

8 Such is the case with an Iraqi Shī'ī cleric Aḥmad al-Ḥasan, known as al-Yamāni (b. 1968). See Golkar, "Clerical Militia," 230.

9 One example is the cleric Ḥasan Abṭāḥī (d. 2015). See Shahi, "Paradoxes of Iranian Mes-sianic Politics," 122.

10 See Hage Ali, *Nationalism*, 149 ff.; Cook, "Waiting for the Twelfth Imam," 131–2.

11 See, for example, al-Nāṣirī, *Nisā' taltaqī bi-ṣāḥib al-zamān*, 23–8.

12 Al-Zubaydī, *Kayfa taltaqī bi-l-imām al-mahdī*, 94. See also, by the same author, a collection of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation entitled *Arwa' al-qīṣaṣ fī man ra'ā l-mahdī fī l-ghayba al-kubrā*, and the chapter on seeing the Imam in his book of 500 questions about the Hidden Imam entitled *500 su'āl ḥawl al-imām al-mahdī*.

13 Al-Zubaydī, *Kayfa taltaqī bi-l-imām al-mahdī*, 32; translation (slightly modified), cited in Hage Ali, *Nationalism*, 153.

14 Khādīmī-Shīrāzī, *Tuḥfih-yi imām mahdī*, 140: "It is an indisputable fact (*qaṭ'ī va bī-tardīd*) that hundreds of eminent ulama (*ṣadhā az 'ulamā-yi buzurḡ*) have encountered our Imam." See also the comments of Ali Hussain: "It is the privilege of Imam that when and where he deems necessary he meets his representatives to clarify and explain any ideological or jurisprudential issues, which are beyond the perception of ordinary mortals." Hussain, *The Awaited Savior*, Question 25.

15 Āl 'Uṣfūr, *Zāhīrat al-ghayba wa-da'wā l-sifāra fī zill imāmat al-mahdī l-muntazar*, 20 (of the appendix): "It is certain and well-known among all Imāmī Shī'a that it is possible to see the lord of the [final] age during the Greater Occultation."

No issue has posed a greater intellectual challenge to Twelver Shī'ī Islam than the *ghayba* of the Imam. The history of Twelver Shī'ī Islam, or what some contemporary Shī'ī ulama call “the unadulterated Islam of Muḥammad” (*islām-i nāb-i Muḥammadi*),¹⁶ has been dominated, during the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam, by attempts to deal with the abrupt loss of the divine guide, to rationalize why he does not reappear, and paradoxically, to exploit his absence and the intellectual space it left for the ulama. 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—most of his followers believe that the Hidden Imam is alive in every sense of the word: he is spiritually and physically present in the world—present and yet concealed. A person reading the above-mentioned anecdotes from recent history might assume the Imam is believed, throughout the *ghayba*, to have been in direct contact with certain of his leading votaries, in particular the ulama. In this book I have sought to rethink this and other suppositions, to explore in the process the incremental invention and development of the tradition of encounters with the Imam, and to contribute to a better understanding of the role of the Hidden Imam in the history of Islamic thought.

On examining the works of hadith and *tafsīr* that have survived from the period that came to be known as the Lesser Occultation (or shortly thereafter), and exploring their implications for the doctrine of *ghayba* and the question of contacting the Hidden Imam, it became clear that the overwhelming majority of these hadiths affirm that not even the Imam's closest followers can see him during his *ghayba*, while a small number suggest that he can be seen but not recognized. Three hadiths adduced by Shī'ī scholars as traditional proof to validate their position that some believers can see and recognize the Imam during the Greater Occultation are understood as justifying the stories of those who have met him. The most important conclusion of the analysis of these hadiths is that all three appear to have emanated from the Wāqifi followers of al-Kāẓim and were later absorbed into Twelver sources and brought into line with emerging dogmas about the *ghayba* of the Hidden Imam. Interrogation of the semantic multivalency of the word *mawlā* in two of these hadiths suggests that although a number of interpretations are plausible, evidence favors either “client” or “servant” as the primary connotation of *mawlā* in these hadiths.

In the initial years of the Greater Occultation, Shī'ī authorities, *naql* (tradition) oriented in their approach, declared that the door to contact with Hidden Imam in a wakeful state was closed practically and permanently. The most

16 See, e.g., Dāvārī (ed.), *Taṣṣīr-i imāmān-i shī'ih dar dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i islām*, 223.

important text that reflects this position is the final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam, which declares anyone who claims to see him before the end of time a “lying impostor.” The decision to disallow any possibility of physically seeing or encountering the Imam in a wakeful state was a reflection of existing historical and political exigencies. We can discern in the writings of the Twelver Shīʿī scholars from this period an implicit, if not at times explicit, dialogue with the rival Shīʿī groups who posed political and military challenges to the Buyid confederacy. The decision to sunder all contact with the Imam and introduce the notion of a second *ghayba* was made as Twelver Shīʿī scholars framed their nascent community as a politically non-threatening alternative branch of Shīʿī Islam.

The subsequent generation of rationalist-leaning, *ʿaql* (reason) oriented ulama partially opened the door that the final *tawqīʿ* had sought to close. These scholars moved the issue of contacting and seeing the Imam from the realm of the impossible to the realm of the theoretically possible. Through interrogating the nuances of their philosophical and theological speculations concerning the *ghayba*, it became evident that by permitting the possibility of encounters with the Imam, *ʿaql*-oriented scholars performed a discursive and an apologetic function: to rationalize the *ghayba* of the Imam before their Muʿtazilī interlocutors. While some earlier researchers tended to assume that stories of encounters with the Imam in a wakeful state were transmitted 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 that some may see the Imam, transmit accounts of anyone physically seeing the Imam in person while awake.

The earliest extant accounts of encounters with the Imam in a wakeful state from the Greater Occultation appeared in the next two centuries, foreshadowed as they were by the rationalist scholars discussed previously. Though these accounts appear some two centuries after the start of the Greater Occultation, the events they relate 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. At this stage the accounts are quite rare. It was only later, beginning in the Safavid period, that the number of accounts increased, and the stories became more embellished. This shift is traced to a new interpretation of the “lying impostors” passage of the final *tawqīʿ*—an interpretation that was tantamount to a *carte blanche* for ulama who cited it and continue to cite it to justify their work of writing, compiling, publishing, or confirming the veracity of collections of stories of contact and encounters with the Imam during the Greater Occultation. In some of these stories, the Imam is, in effect, trans-

formed from primarily a miracle worker into a doctrinal and legal teacher of the ulama, buttressing their newly defined station as his “general representatives.”

The analysis offered in this book takes a modest step toward appreciating the significance of the question of encountering the Hidden Imam, as well as the nature and dynamic of authority in Shī‘ī Islam in light of its doctrinal modalities, in the hope of paving the way for future studies that will focus on the development of this tradition and the provenance, ramification, and consequences of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam since the mid-nineteenth century.

A Descriptive Catalogue of Some Key Sources That Deal with the Subject of Encounters with the Hidden Imam

What follows is an annotated catalogue of some of the main collections of stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam and other books that emphasize these stories, mentioned by Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī (d. 1970) in his *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, a comprehensive bibliography of works written up to 1950–1.¹

1. *Al-'Abqārī l-ḥisān fī aḥwāl* (var., *tawārīkh*) *mawlānā ṣāhib al-zamān* (The fine wonders of beauty concerning the circumstances [var., chronicles] of our master, the lord of the [final] age) (Persian), by 'Alī-Akbar Nahāvandī (b. 1280/1863–4, d. 1950),² a student of al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī.³ It is one of the lengthiest works on the Hidden Imam.⁴ One of the main sections of the work is entitled *al-Yāqūt al-aḥmar fī-man ra'ā l-ḥujja al-muntazar* (The red ruby concerning those who have seen the eagerly awaited Proof [of God]). This section was republished as a separate book under the title *Barakāt-i ḥadrat-i valī-i 'aṣr* (The blessings of the Guardian of the Age). The book is divided into 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) sightings and unveilings, concerning people who saw the Imam in a state between wakefulness and sleep (16 accounts); (4) veridical dreams (29 accounts); (5) traces of the Hidden Imam, concerning accounts of those who saw the light of the Imam, heard his voice, or inhaled his fragrance (52 accounts) (this chapter also includes the *tawqī'āt* of the Imam and accounts of miracles performed

1 On al-Ṭīhrānī, see Algar, “Āqā (or Āgā) Bozorg Tehrānī,” *Elr*, 2:169–70. On his *al-Dharī'a*, see Kohlberg, *al-Darī'a elā Taṣānīf al-Šī'a*, *Elr*, 7:35–6.

2 On *al-'Abqārī l-ḥisān*, see al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 15:215–6 (no. 1419). Henry Corbin is among the few Western scholar who have taken note of this work. See Corbin, *Histoire*, 108 [= Corbin, *History*, 69], where he calls it “*al-Kitāb al-'abqārī*,” and Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4:303–4 n. 2, where he calls it, “*al-Kitāb al-'abqārī al-hossan fi ithbāt Mawlānā Ṣāhib al-zamān*.”

3 Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥadrat-i valī-i 'aṣr*, 16. On Nahāvandī, see Mišbāh, “Ḥājj Shaykh 'Alī-Akbar Nahāvandī.” Nahāvandī also recorded stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam in his *Khazīnat al-jawāhir*, 1:378–80; 2:1047–55.

4 *Al-'Abqārī l-ḥisān* has been republished by the Jamkarān publishing house in nine volumes, comprising 4,400 pages.

by him); (6) accounts of those who prayed to the Hidden Imam to intercede for them (*tavassulāt*) and whose prayers were answered (19 accounts); and (7) accounts of those who met the servants, the four emissaries (*sufarā'*) or deputies (*wukalā'*) of the Imam (47 accounts—all from the Lesser Occultation).

Most of the accounts are of prominent or less well-known ulama who are said to have encountered the Imam, especially clerics from the time of Nahāvandī or the previous century, including al-Waḥīd al-Bihbihānī (d. 1791), Baḥr al-'Ulūm al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1797), Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafī—known as “Ṣāhib al-Jawāhir” (d. 1850), Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī (d. 1864), Ḥasan Shīrāzī, known as Mīrzā-yi Shīrāzī (d. 1895), Āqā Najafī Iṣfahānī (d. 1914), Muḥammad-Ḥusayn Nā'inī (d. 1936), 'Abd al-Karīm Yazdī Ḥā'irī (d. 1937)—the influential *marjī' al-taqlīd* who founded the modern *hawza* in Qum, and Abū l-Ḥasan Iṣfahānī (d. 1946).

The editor of *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i 'aṣr*, Sayyid Javād Mu'allim, maintains that there are so many stories of people who have seen the Imam that the matter no longer needs to be proven.⁵ He emphasizes that anyone, regardless of learning or piety, can see the Imam, though in fact most of the stories are of scholars and students of knowledge.⁶ According to Mu'allim, the accounts serve to prove that the Imam “truly is among us” (*ān ḥaḍrat vāqī'an dar bayn-i mā hastand*).⁷ Stories of prominent ulama encountering the Imam are included throughout the work, though sources are not cited for any of the accounts.⁸ A report is also related of Nahāvandī's scribe, a certain Muḥammad-'Alī Ḥā'irī, seeing the Hidden Imam.⁹

2. *Badā'i' al-kalām fī-man fāza bi-liqā' al-imām 'alayh al-salām* (Wondrous words concerning those who have attained the presence of the Imam, peace be upon him) (Arabic?), by Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Murtaḍā al-Yazdī al-Ḥā'irī al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. ca. 1313/1895–6).¹⁰ According to al-Ṭīhrānī, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī mentioned this book in a list of his written works found at the end of his *Akhbār al-awā'il*, published in

5 Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i 'aṣr*, 13 (from the intro. by Mu'allim).

6 Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i 'aṣr*, 14 (from the intro. by Mu'allim).

7 Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i 'aṣr*, 18 (from the intro. by Mu'allim).

8 Page references for stories about the following individuals appear in the parentheses after their names: Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (366–9); Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī (72); Allāma al-Ḥillī (176–7, 179–80); al-Shahīd al-Thānī (179); al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī (360); Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī (177–8); Āqā Najafī Iṣfahānī (178–9); 'Alī al-Ḥā'irī al-Yazdī (192–3).

9 Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i 'aṣr*, 359. Nahāvandī describes miracles and encounters with the Imam in other works as well, e.g., his *Rāḥat al-rūḥ yā kishṭi-i najāt*, 144–5, 170–4.

10 Al-Qazwīnī, *al-Imām al-mahdī*, 254, lists the title of the book as *Badā'i' al-kalām fī-man ij̄tama' bi-l-imām*. Al-Qazwīnī's introduction was plagiarized by al-Ibrāhīmī, *I'raf imām zamānika*, 83–4.

1312/1894–5.¹¹ According to al-Amīn, a section of this work was published in Bombay in 1308/1890–1 and featured an endorsement (*taqrīz*) by al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī.¹²

3. *Bahjat al-awliyā' fī-man 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 Kāzīm 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-Ṭīhrānī, this title was mentioned in the work of one of al-*Almāsī*'s students. It has never been published and no manuscripts are known to exist.¹³

4. *Bughyat al-ṭālib fī-man ra'ā l-imām al-ghā'ib 'alayh al-salām* (The object of the seeker's desire concerning those who have seen the Hidden Imam) (Persian), by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Birjandī al-Qā'inī (b. 1276/1859–60, d. 1933–4). This work was printed in Mashhad in 1923–4.¹⁴ An autograph is available in the library of Ayatollah Mar'ashī-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 al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, among others.¹⁵ According to al-Ṭīhrānī, this work mentions or makes use of an anti-Bābī polemical work entitled *al-Radd 'alā l-bābiyya* by Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Khūsufī al-Qā'inī, another student of Mīrzā-yi Shīrāzī.¹⁶

5. *Dār al-salām fī man fāza bi-salām al-Imām* (The abode of peace concerning those who attained the peace of the Imam) (Persian), by Maḥmūd b. Ja'far al-Maythamī al-

11 Al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 3:65 (no. 190).

12 Al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, 9:254.

13 Al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 3:160 (no. 567). Al-Qazwīnī, *al-Imām al-mahdī*, 254, lists the title of the book as *al-Bahja fī-man fāza bi-liqā' al-ḥujja*. The book is said to include an account about an unnamed believer from Baghdad (alive in 1136/1723–4) who, while stranded on an island, sees a giant snake killed by a rabbit, then encounters a group of people and realizes, after being transported back to his home, that one of them was the Hidden Imam. Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1902) read this account in *Nūr al-'uyūn*, a work written by one of al-*Almāsī*'s students. Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, 76–9 (no. 29) [Persian translation: al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:632–4 (no. 38)]. This suggests that al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī did not have access to *Bahjat al-awliyā'*. The story is also cited in al-Ḥā'irī al-Yazdī, *Ilzām al-nāṣib*, 2:41–2 (no. 26), who gives the title of the book as *Bahjat al-awliyā' fī dhikr man ra'āhu fī l-ghayba al-kubrā*. Similar stories of island encounters with the Hidden Imam are recorded in *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:462–72 (no. 2), 2:597–615 (no. 37), 2:739–41 (no. 83).

14 Al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 3:133 (no. 449).

15 Mahdīpūr, *Kitāb-nāmih-yi ḥadrat-i mahdī*, 1:175 (no. 398).

16 Al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 10:189 (no. 453).

‘Irāqī (b. 1240/1825 in Tehran; d. 1306/1888–9, 1308/1890–1 or 1310/1892–3 in Najaf).¹⁷ The author is often referred to in Shī‘ī biographical sources as “Şāhib-i Dār al-salām” (“the author of *Dār al-salām*”).¹⁸ Completed by al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī in 1301/1884, two years later, *Dār al-salām* was published by the official state printing house in Tehran, with the blessing of Nāşir al-Dīn Shah and the imperial court, in lithograph form and a generous initial printing of 1,000 copies. It was first typeset in Tehran in 1333 Sh./1954. An abridged form of the book has been published under the title *Ru‘yā-yi nūr* (Visions of the light),¹⁹ and the monograph itself has been published repeatedly, including in 2008 by 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 zuḥūr va-kisānī kih dar khwāb yā bīdārī biḥ maḥḍar-i ān ḥaḍrat-i mubārak sharaḥyāb shudih-and* (The abode of peace concerning the Mahdī, the portents of his advent, and [the accounts of] those who were honored to attain his presence in dreams or while awake). Many of the stories recounted in *Dār al-salām* are reproduced in subsequent books on the subject of encounters with the Imam.

Dār al-salām is composed of six 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. Part 5 constitutes the largest section of the book and is devoted mainly to stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam. The third chapter of this section is devoted to stories of those who encountered the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation. Here, al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī 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.²⁰ He then records a number of accounts of those who saw the Imam while awake and those who saw him in dreams and visions.²¹ 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, after having seen him, recognized that they had seen the Hidden Imam. The accounts in this section are mainly of eminent ulama from the Safavid and Qajar periods, including al-Ardabīlī and Baḥr al-‘Ulūm al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī. In addition, in this work, al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī provides, for the first time, a now famous account of his teacher Murtaḍā al-Anşārī encountering the Hidden Imam in Najaf (see chapter 4, above). This account appears in virtually all the

17 On this work, see al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī‘a*, 8:20–1 (no. 18); Mahdavi, *Zindigīnāmih-yi ‘Allāmah Majlisī*, 2:284. An 1886 lithograph copy is available in the Princeton University Library (call number: 2465.4985.328q) under the title *Dār al-salām al-mushtamil ‘alā dhikr man fāza bi-salām* (344 fols.).

18 On al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī, see I‘timād al-Salṭanih, *Ulamā-yi*, 126; al-Amīn, *A‘yān al-shī‘a*, 10:103; Şāhrā‘ī, “Maythamī-‘Irāqī,” *DMT*, 15:568; Ghaemmaghami, “The Abode of Peace.”

19 Al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī, *Ru‘yā-yi nūr*.

20 Al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 448–64, 464–72.

21 Al-Maythamī al-‘Irāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 474–85.

biographical works on al-Anṣārī and has strengthened his reputation as a pious jurist with access to the Hidden Imam. Perhaps most significant of all, al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī provides two accounts of himself encountering the Imam. In one report, he looks back to a time when he was deeply disturbed by a number of ulama “who had strayed from the path” (*munḥarīf shudand*) of the Imams and died clinging to “corrupt beliefs” (*ʿaqāʾid-i fāsīdah*). This is a reference to ulama that al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī branded as heretics, that is, ulama who embraced the Shaykhī school and the Bābī movement, including at least one of al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī’s colleagues from the time he was a student of al-Anṣārī.²² While 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, al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī 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 will not leave without you (*bī-tū nīmīravam*).” Al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī understood the Imam’s words to mean that the Imam would not enter paradise without al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī, perhaps suggesting that al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī would live to witness the Imam’s appearance, then die with him.²³

6. *Hidāyat al-anām fī-man laqiya al-ḥujja fī l-manām* (Guidance to humanity concerning those who met the Proof [of God] in dreams) (Persian), by the prolific scholar Ḥusayn b. Naṣr Allāh b. Šādiq al-Ḥusaynī al-Mūsawī al-ʿArab-Bāghī, also known as Ḥusayn Urūmiyyih-ī and ʿArab-Bāghī Urmavī (d. 1950).²⁴ According to al-Ṭīhrānī, *Hidāyat al-anām* was completed on 6 May 1913 and printed in Tabriz the following year. Al-Ṭīhrānī notes that it was also appended to Urmavī’s *al-Tuḥfa al-mahdawiyya fī aḥwāl al-imām al-mahdī*, which was completed in 1330/1911–2 and printed in Tabriz in 1335/1916–7.²⁵ *Hidāyat al-anām* has been reprinted at least five times. In the introduction, Urmavī explains that having written *al-Tuḥfa al-mahdawiyya* the previous year and included forty stories of those who attained the presence of the Hidden Imam,

22 See Ghaemmaghami, “The Abode of Peace.” Al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī also wrote an anti-Shaykhī polemic called *Kifāyat al-rāshidīn fī l-radd ʿalā jamāʿa min al-mubdiʿīn*. Al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, 18:91–2 (no. 825).

23 The two accounts are also cited in Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i ʿaṣr*, 393–4. Another collection of encounter stories attributed to al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī, though not mentioned by al-Ṭīhrānī in *al-Dharīʿa*, is *Tadhkirat al-ṭālib fī-man raʾā l-imām al-ghāʾib*. This work has never been published, and I know of no extant manuscripts, but it is mentioned in passing in al-Qazwīnī, *al-Imām al-mahdī*, 254; al-Zanjānī al-Najafī, *ʿAqāʾid al-imāmiyya*, 1:248; Ṭayyib, *Kalim al-ṭayyib*, 537; al-Gulpāyigānī, *Muntakhab al-athar*, 381.

24 On ʿArab-Bāghī Urūmī, see Khiradmand, *Gudhar-i āftāb*.

25 Al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharīʿa*, 25:174 (no. 114); 3:475 (no. 1748), calls the book *al-Tuḥfa al-mahdīyya*. Chapter 11 includes accounts of forty individuals who encountered the Hidden Imam (*fāzū bi-ziyāratihī*).

it occurred to him to write a separate work and compile forty accounts of those who dreamt of the Hidden Imam.²⁶ Many of the accounts are taken from the works of al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī.

7. *Jannat al-ma'wā fi dhikr man fāza bi-liqā' al-ḥujja aw mu'jazātihi fi l-ghayba al-kubrā* (The garden of refuge concerning those who attained the presence of the Proof [of God] or [witnessed] his miracles during the Greater Occultation) (Arabic), by al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1902), completed on 13 Shawwāl 1302/26 July 1885.²⁷ This work includes fifty-nine accounts not mentioned by al-Majlisī in his *Bihār al-anwār*.²⁸ Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, in fact, hoped that his work would serve as an addendum to the volume of *Bihār 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].”²⁹

8. *Kifāyat al-muhtadī fi ma'rifat al-mahdī 'alayh al-salām* (That which suffices the rightly guided in knowing and recognizing the Mahdī, peace be upon him) (Persian), by Muḥammad Hādī b. Muḥammad Mīr Lawḥī Sabzavārī (fl. eleventh/seventeenth century).³⁰ Also known as *Arba'ūn-i Mīr Lawḥī*,³¹ *Kifāyat al-muhtadī* is a Persian translation of, and commentary on, forty hadiths about the twelfth Imam, twenty-five of which are found in *Ithbāt al-raj'a*, a work ascribed to Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nishābūrī (d. 260/873).³² 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 Sha'bān 1081/27 December 1670.³³

26 Urmavī, *Hidāyat al-anām*, 1.

27 See al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dhar'ā*, 5:159–60 (no. 675).

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

29 Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-ma'wā*, 11. *Jannat al-ma'wā* continues to be regularly published as an addendum to the volume of al-Majlisī's *Bihār al-anwār* on the Hidden Imam. See al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, 53:199–336.

30 On the author, see Hairī, “Mīr Lawḥī,” *ET*²; Turner, *Islam without Allah?*, 212–3; Turner, “Still Waiting for the Imam?” 45–7; Ṭāwūsī-Masrūr, “Mīr-Lawḥī, Sayyid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad,” *DMT*, 15: 586–7.

31 Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 112.

32 Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 132. Cf. al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dhar'ā*, 16: 78 (no. 395), who seems to regard al-Nishābūrī's books, *al-Ghayba* and *Ithbāt al-raj'a*, as one and the same book, in the possession of Mīr-Lawḥī, but no longer available. See also Amīnī, “Kitāb-i ghaybat-i Shaykh Ṭūsī,” 472.

33 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.

The book was completed two years later.³⁴ The chapter on hadith no. 37 (a hadith ascribed to al-Ṣādiq which says that all the miracles that were performed by the prophets and their successors will also be performed by the Qā'im) is the longest chapter of the work. This chapter comprises accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam and stories of miracles ascribed to the Imam.³⁵

On encounters during the period of the Greater Occultation, Mīr Lawḥī states, "There have been many Shī'a and *mawālī* who have attained [the Hidden Imam's] presence." He refers readers to the three works I have discussed in this book (al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn*, al-Rāwandī's *al-Kharā'ij*, and al-Irbilī's *Kashf al-ghumma*) as well as *al-Fuṣūl al-muhimma*.³⁶ Regarding the final *tawqī'* of the Imam, he states, "What has been mentioned in the hadith, 'Anyone who claims to have seen [me] before the appearance of al-Sufyānī and [the sounding of] the Cry is a lying impostor,' does not contradict these accounts (*bā in akhbār munāfāt nadārad*)." Mīr Lawḥī directs readers to his work *Riyāḍ al-mu'minīn* for a more detailed discussion of the issue.³⁷ He also states that an unnamed Shī'ī 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 assisting the helpless that were they all to be collected, it would become a large tome (*kitābī 'aẓīm mīshavad*).³⁸ He then cites two accounts from this unnamed author, transmitted from al-Irbilī's *Kashf al-ghumma*: the story of Ismā'īl al-Hirqilī and the story of the father of a certain al-Bāqī b. 'Aṭwa al-'Alawī al-Ḥusaynī.³⁹ The only other account from the period of the Greater Occultation he cites is the story of the youth and the Black Stone (see chapter 4 for this account).⁴⁰ Mīr-Lawḥī adds, "I know a sick person who has seen the Imam multiple times (*mukarrar ān ḥaḍrat rā dīdih*). At one point, he suffered from a terminal illness, but the Imam fully healed him."⁴¹ Mīr-Lawḥī then refers to the hadith

34 On the work, see al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 18: 101–2 (no. 867).

35 Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 585–641.

36 This is a reference to *al-Fuṣūl al-muhimma l-ma'rifat al-a'imma al-ithnī-'ashar wa-faḍlihim wa-ma'rifat awlādihim wa-naslihim* by Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Ṣabbāgh al-Mālikī al-Makkī (d. 855/1451–2), a Sunnī scholar from the Maghrib whose testimony in support of the twelfth Imam being the Mahdī is often referred to by Shī'ī apologists. See Madelung, "al-Mahdī," *ET*². On *al-Fuṣūl al-muhimma*, see al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 16: 246 (no. 978). *Al-Fuṣūl al-muhimma* has been published, but there are no accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imam from the period of the Greater Occultation. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, *al-Fuṣūl al-muhimma*, 2:1095–1136.

37 The full title of this work is *Riyāḍ al-mu'minīn wa-ḥadā'iq al-muttaqīn* but it does not appear to have survived. See al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 11:329 (no. 2011). Mīr-Lawḥī wrote this work in his youth. Hairī, "Mīr Lawḥī," *ET*², 7:94.

38 Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 628.

39 Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 629–34.

40 Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 625–7.

41 Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 634.

that states that when the Imam attends the pilgrimage, people see him but are unable to recognize him. It appears that he understands this hadith to be applicable for the period of the Greater Occultation as well. He also quotes the account of Ibn Fāris al-Adīb (see chapter 3 for this account), though he does not say 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 he cites are from the Lesser Occultation. It is thus odd that Mīr-Lawḥī states, at this point, that “most of the stories that have been mentioned took place during the Greater Occultation” (*va hikāyāti kih madhkūr shud akthar dar ghaybat-i kubrā būd*).⁴²

9. *Al-Najm al-thāqib fī aḥwāl al-imām al-ghā'ib* (also called *Najm-i thāqib*) (The star of piercing brightness, concerning the circumstances of the Hidden Imam) (Persian), by al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, completed shortly after *Jannat al-ma'wā* on 14 Dhū l-Qa'da 1302/25 August 1885.⁴³ Chapter seven, by far the longest chapter of the book, features one hundred stories of those who encountered or contacted the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation. According to al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, his teacher Mīrzā-yi Shirāzī urged him to write *Najm-i thāqib*, gave the manuscript his seal of approval, and asserted that no other work on the Hidden Imam rivals it.⁴⁴ Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī states that his main purpose in compiling the stories is to prove the existence of the Imam, demonstrate that he lives among the people, and show how his presence benefits them. That the work was written in Persian betrays a desire to make the stories available to the educated public in al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī's native land. *Najm-i thāqib* has been published and reprinted numerous times in the original language. It has also been published in abridged form under the title *Khūrshūd-i ghā'ib* (The hidden sun).⁴⁵ The one hundred stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam during the Greater Occultation have also been extracted and published as a separate volume.⁴⁶ Additionally, *Najm-i thāqib* has been translated into Arabic (twice) and English.

10. *Tabṣirat al-walī fī-man ra'ā l-qā'im al-mahdī* (The mental perception of the guardian [of the age] concerning those who have seen the Qā'im, the Mahdī) (Arabic), by Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1695–96 or 1109/1697–98).⁴⁷ Completed in

42 Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-muhtadī*, 637.

43 Al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 24:69 (no. 352). See a recent edition with the Persianized title: al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib dar aḥwāl-i imām-i ghā'ib*.

44 Al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 1:36–7.

45 [Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī], *Khūrshūd-i ghā'ib*.

46 [Al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī], *Mā imām-i zamān*.

47 On the author, see Tabrīziyān, *al-Allāma al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Baḥrānī*, 17–87; al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, dāl-nūn (from the book's introduction); Madelung, “Baḥrānī, Hāšem,” *Elr*, 3:528–9; Lawson, “Akhbārī Shī'ī Approaches to *tafsīr*,” 187.

1099/1688, this work contains seventy-six accounts of encounters with the Imam, most of which took place during the period of the Lesser Occultation.⁴⁸ Al-Baḥrānī states in the introduction that it occurred to him to compile the reports of those who had seen or heard the Imam's voice during the lifetime of his father, the eleventh Imam (al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī), and then during "the first and second occultations," adding that there are numerous such accounts "in dependable books and reliable works."⁴⁹ A separate work by al-Baḥrānī called *Faṣl mu'tabar fī-man ra'ā l-imām al-thānī 'ashar al-qā'im al-muntaẓar* (A credible chapter concerning those who have seen the twelfth Imam, the awaited Qā'im) has been published as an addendum to *Tabṣirat al-walī*. According to Tabrīziyān, *Faṣl mu'tabar* was likely intended to be a condensed version of *Tabṣirat al-walī* with some additional accounts.⁵⁰

48 The comment by al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī'a*, 3:326 (no. 1192), cited 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" is incorrect, since al-Baḥrānī includes the story of the Green Island in the White Sea, which is clearly much later. For information about manuscripts, abridgements, and translations, see Tabrīziyān, *al-'Allāma al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Baḥrānī*, 11–4. For a partial Persian translation, see Baḥrānī, *Rawzanihī bih khūrshīd*.

49 Al-Baḥrānī, *Tabṣirat al-walī*, 4.

50 Tabrīziyān, *al-'Allāma al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Baḥrānī*, 141.

Al-Majlisī's Gloss of the "lying impostor" Passage of the Final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam

The Safavid scholar Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī interpreted the "lying impostor" passage of the final *tawqīʿ* of the Hidden Imam as applying only those who claim to see the Imam *and* be his exclusive representative (like the four emissaries (*sufarāʿ*) from the Lesser Occultation). Al-Majlisī's gloss of this phrase has served as the established position on the issue, as evidenced by the fact that it is quoted, alluded to, or referred to by numerous scholars after him. To illustrate this point, I list thirteen ulama and scholars whose writings about the Hidden Imam embrace or reiterate al-Majlisī's interpretation of the final *tawqīʿ*. The list is not meant to be exhaustive.

1. The scholar and Quran commentator ʿAbd Allāh al-Shubbar (d. 1242/1826–7) cites al-Majlisī's explanation almost verbatim to validate stories from the time of the Greater Occultation of "large numbers of pious and trustworthy scholars of the past and present" who have met the Hidden Imam.¹

2/3. Maḥmūd al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī (d. 1306/1888–9, 1308/1890–1 or 1310/1892–3) and Ḥusayn al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1902) both quote al-Majlisī's explanation verbatim in the chapters of their collections devoted to reconciling the final *tawqīʿ* and hadiths stating that the Hidden Imam cannot be seen with stories of those who have encountered him during the Greater Occultation.²

4. The celebrated reformist Lebanese scholar and Shīʿī biographer Muḥsin al-Amīn (d. 1957–8) concedes that "there are hadiths that establish the impossibility of seeing [the Imam] (*dālla ʿalā ʿadam imkān al-ruʿya*) during the Greater Occultation." He argues that the way to reconcile these hadiths with the accounts describing encoun-

1 Al-Shubbar, *al-Anwār*, 36. In the chapter on the Hidden Imam in his exposition of core Shīʿī doctrines and beliefs, al-Shubbar does not refer to any of the encounter stories during the period of the Greater Occultation, see al-Shubbar, *Haqq al-yaqīn*, 283–91. On the author, see the introduction to his Quran commentary, al-Shubbar, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm*, 56–7; Anṣārī, *Tashayyuʿ-i imāmī*, 81–120.

2 Al-Maythamī al-ʿIrāqī, *Dār al-salām*, 193; al-Nūrī, *Najm-i thāqib*, 2:852; al-Nūrī al-Ṭabarsī, *Jannat al-maʿwā*, 146. See appendix I for descriptions of these works.

ters 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]."³

5. Muġtabā Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī (d. 1967) argues that the hadiths indicating that the people cannot recognize the Imam do not contradict (*tanāfi nadārad*) the stories of people who have seen the Imam "because the meaning [of those hadiths] is that while the Imam is amongst the people, the generality of people cannot recognize him. Therefore, there is no contradiction between these hadiths and the fact that a small number (*'iddih-yi qalīlī*) of people have seen (the Imam)."⁴ Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī maintains that the final *tawqī* sought not only to prevent harmful innovations and heretical teachings (*bid'at-hā*) from being introduced into Shī'ī Islam, but also to anathematize anyone who claimed to be the Imam's special representative during the Greater Occultation "like the Šūfī poles, the Shaykhī fourth pillar (*rukn-i rābī-i shaykhīyyih*), as well as those who claim to be the Mahdī [himself]." He then decries the fact that "this blessed narration" issued by "the source of inspiration and the dawning place of revelation (*ma'din-i vaḥy va-maṭla'-i tanzīl*)" has not been studied, reflected on, and accepted by all of the Shī'a, for if it had, such claimants who divided the Shī'ī community and caused great suffering to the Shī'a would never have appeared.⁵

6. 'Alī Davānī (d. 2007) asserts that the *tawqī* anathematizes anyone who claims to be the Imam's representative or the Imam himself. He adds that it is entirely possible for pious and righteous Shī'a and the devoted friends (*dūstān-i khālīš*) of the Imam to see him during the Greater Occultation but choose not to tell anyone.⁶ Davānī then argues that eminent scholars like al-Murtaḍā, al-Ṭūsī, and Baḥr al-'Ulūm al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī all affirmed that

the Shī'ī ulama do not believe that the Imam of the Age cannot appear to his righteous friends (*dūstān-i pāksirīsh*). On the contrary, it is certainly possible for them to see the Imam and either recognize him or not recognize him. All

3 [= *wa-īṣāl al-akhbār min jānibihī 'alā mīthāl al-sufarā'*] Al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, 2:71, also cited in Kawrānī, *Ḥawl ru'yat al-mahdī l-muntazār*, 57–8. On al-Amīn's monumental biography of prominent Shī'ī figures and scholars, see Ende, "A'yān al-Šī'a," *Elr*, 3:130–1.

4 Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī, *Bayān al-furqān*, 901.

5 Qazvīnī-Khurāsānī, *Bayān al-furqān*, 902, also cited in al-Majlisī, *Mahdī maw'ūd* (trans. Davānī), 928 (no. 1). On the Shaykhī doctrine of the 'fourth pillar,' see Amir-Moezzi, "An Absence Filled with Presences," 40–52.

6 Davānī adds an explanation to his translation of al-Majlisī's explanation. See al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd* (trans. Davānī), 929 n. 1, 943 n. 1.

of our great scholars like al-Kulaynī and al-Ṣadūq narrated stories of such encounters in their works.⁷

7. The prolific Iraqi scholar Bāqir Sharīf al-Qurashī (d. 2012) argues 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 Shī‘ī ulama” who have definitely (*min al-maqtū‘*) seen the Imam. However, he mentions only one, which he considered the best explanation: anyone who claims to have seen the Imam and likewise claims to be the Imam’s representative is a lying impostor.⁸ Elsewhere, al-Qurashī avers that during the Greater Occultation, “the great jurists (*al-fuqahā’ al-‘izām*) became the “sources of emulation” and received [the position of] the most great representation (*al-niyāba al-‘uẓmā*) from the eagerly awaited Imam. During [the Greater Occultation], the [Hidden] Imam had numerous encounters and corresponded often with prominent ulama.”⁹ He names only one such scholar: al-Mufīd, who, as mentioned in chapter 4, is alleged to have received letters from the Hidden Imam.

8. Contemporary scholar Ḥabīb Ṭāhirī concedes that “some” reject the stories of encounters with the Imam based on hadiths (*riwāyāt*) that state that whoever claims to have seen the Imam or encountered him should be declared a liar. He does not say explicitly who these are, but he does mention that we are living at a time when “the enemies of the Imam claim that [these stories] are lies.”¹⁰ Ṭāhirī responds to these naysayers by first arguing that it is not hadiths, plural, but rather one hadith, the last *tawqīf* of the Hidden Imam, that declares that all those who claim to have seen the Imam are frauds. He then argues that the key word in the final *tawqīf* is “impostor” (*muftar*) which suggests that the *tawqīf* does not condemn everyone who has encountered the Imam as liars but rather only those who have seen him and claim to be his exclusive representative.¹¹

Elsewhere, Ṭāhirī adds a parenthetical note to his Persian translation of the “lying impostors” passage: “Anyone who claims to have seen (in the sense that the four representatives saw me) is a lying impostor.”¹² In other words, Ṭāhirī asserts that anyone who claims to have seen the Imam and likewise claimed to be his representative is a

7 Al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw‘ūd* (trans. Davānī), 943 n. 1.

8 Al-Qurashī, *Ḥayāt al-Imām al-Mahdī*, 130–1, 134.

9 [= *kānat lil-imām ‘iddat iltiqā‘āt wa-murāsālāt ma‘a ‘uyūn al-‘ulamā’*] Al-Qurashī, *Ḥayāt al-Imām al-Mahdī*, 133–4.

10 Ṭāhirī, *Sīmā-yi āftāb*, 308.

11 Ṭāhirī, *Sīmā-yi āftāb*, 309.

12 Ṭāhirī, *Sīmā-yi āftāb*, 231.

liar. Otherwise, if one does not claim to be the Imam's representative, this sentence of the *tawqīʿ* does not apply.

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 force them to reveal the Imam's location (so that they might kill him); and if they refused, the enemies would incarcerate them for life.¹³

9. The contemporary Najaf-based scholar ʿAlī al-Sabzavārī, son and student of the "Grand Ayatollah" ʿAbd al-ʿAlā al-Sabzavārī (d. 1993), argues that the final *tawqīʿ* "established the position of general representation (*al-niyāba al-ʿamma*) for the *fuqahāʾ* and the *mujtahids*."¹⁴ Al-Sabzavārī goes on to say that the ulama who have been blessed to meet the Hidden Imam have attained a level of spiritual maturity (*kamāl*), truthfulness (*ṣidq*), and loyalty (*wafāʾ*) that others can attest to; he cites the examples of al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī and Baḥr al-ʿUlūm al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī.¹⁵ He maintains that the ulama who saw the Imam were ordered to keep their encounters with him secret (*maʾmūr bi-l-kitmān*) as long as they lived. After they died, their students and close associates revealed that their teacher or colleague had met the Imam.¹⁶

10. In his short work *Ḥawl ruʾyat al-mahdī l-muntaẓar* (an introduction to a longer book), ʿAlī Kawrānī, a Lebanese scholar and the author of numerous books about the Mahdī, argues that "without a doubt, the clearest proof that settles any disagreements about his existence or nonexistence is seeing him." He then adds, "fortunately, the accounts of those who have been honored by seeing him number in the hundreds and cover all periods of time from both the Lesser and Greater Occultation."¹⁷ He refers to the one hundred accounts compiled in al-Nūrī's *Najm-i thāqib* and states that al-Nūrī "bore witness to the truth of each and every account and still there are those among us who reject the truth of these stories!"¹⁸ Kawrānī contends that the ulama have not denied the pos-

13 Ṭāhirī, *Simā-yi āftāb*, 219. As of 19 July 2012, Ṭāhirī was the chair of the Department of Islamic Propagation at the Islamic Development Organization, an institution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Website of the Islamic Development Organization, 14 July 2012, <http://www.ido.ir/n.aspx?n=13910424353>. Among some Shīʿī ulama and scholars today, "the enemies of the Imam" is code for Israel, the United States, and their agents.

14 Al-Sabzavārī, *Umr al-imām al-mahdī*, 68.

15 Al-Sabzavārī, *Umr al-imām al-mahdī*, 65–6.

16 Al-Sabzavārī, *Umr al-imām al-mahdī*, 65.

17 Kawrānī, *Ḥawl ruʾyat al-mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 9.

18 Kawrānī, *Ḥawl ruʾyat al-mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 70.

sibility of meeting the Imam.¹⁹ He adds that “there is no room whatsoever to reject the possibility of meeting [the Imam]; whoever attempts to reject [this possibility] has adopted an aberrant opinion that does not deserve any consideration (*fa-ra’yuhu shādh-dh lā yultafat ilahiyi*).”²⁰

In a different work, Kawrānī writes:

Some adduce the [final] *tawqīr* of the Imam to the fourth *safīr*, al-Samurī, as proof that [the Imam] cannot be seen during the Greater Occultation. However, from the beginning of the Greater Occultation until now, the most eminent of our jurists and scholars among the foremost “sources of emulation” have affirmed the possibility of seeing [him] or the reality of seeing him. They do not believe that the final *tawqīr* [of the Hidden Imam] to al-Samurī represents proof of the impossibility [of seeing the Imam]. Rather, [the *tawqīr*] negates seeing [the Imam] in the sense that [the favor of seeing him] was granted to al-Samurī as a special representative (*ka-nā’ib khāṣṣ*) [of the Imam]. In other words, the *tawqīr* negates anyone seeing [the Imam], if that claim is followed by a claim to be the special representative [of the Imam].

Kawrānī then argues that we know that this is the meaning of the *tawqīr* because, according to the opinion of the ulama, the “stories of seeing [the Imam] with sound chains of transmission” (*qiṣaṣ al-mushāhada al-ṣaḥīḥa al-sanad*) settle the matter of seeing the Imam and verify it beyond doubt. Moreover, Kawrānī asserts that “many of those who were honored to meet him are among the most eminent ulama and the most venerable of the pious.”²¹

11. After repeating al-Majlisī’s interpretation of the final *tawqīr*, the contemporary “Grand Ayatollah” Luṭf Allāh Gulpāyigānī (b. 1918) cites the many “famous, well-authenticated stories” of ulama who have met the Imam as proof that the final *tawqīr* does not reject the possibility of seeing the Imam during the Greater Occultation.²² He went as far as to declare that “an intelligent person would never entertain any doubt about the soundness” of these stories. Gulpāyigānī speculates that perhaps the intent of the

19 Kawrānī, *Ḥawl ru’yat al-mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 58. Later, he states that with the exception of al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī who speak about “the possibility” (*imkāniyya*) of meeting the Imam, all the other ulama speak about the occurrence (*wuqū’*) of seeing the Imam, Kawrānī, *Ḥawl ru’yat al-mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 63.

20 Kawrānī, *Ḥawl ru’yat al-mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 59.

21 Kawrānī, *Ādāb ‘aṣr al-ghayba*, 179–81.

22 Gulpāyigānī, *Imāmat va-mahdaviyyat*, 2:475; Gulpāyigānī, *Pāsukh-i dah pursish*, 64–5.

tawqīr was to reject anyone who claims that he has the ability to see the Imam at will, that is, to meet the Imam whenever he wishes. He also considers the possibility that the *tawqīr* is meant as a reminder to those who see the Imam, that they must not divulge the secret of their encounter. However, Gulpāyigānī leaves open the possibility that certain individuals are capable of seeing the Imam at will, but even these people should never reveal that they have this power; otherwise, according to his reading of the *tawqīr*, they must be denounced as liars.²³ Elsewhere, Gulpāyigānī asserts that along with hadiths ascribed to the previous Imams foretelling the *ghayba* of the Qā'im, the stories of encounters with the Hidden Imam constitute the greatest proof of his existence.²⁴

12. The prolific Quran commentator and cleric Muḥammad Muḥammadī Ishtihārdī (d. 1385 Sh./2006) asserts that the Imams decreed that whoever claims to see the Hidden Imam should be declared a liar. It is not clear what hadiths or reports he is referring to when he says "the Imams." He goes on to write that claimants to encounters with the Imam have been condemned as liars throughout history because many of those claimed to see the Imam also claimed to be the Imam's representative. He adds that anyone who brings a law or commandment from the Imam should be declared a liar. He argues that many of the accounts of those who have met the Imam have been related after the person died; but if the person does not have a bad intention, there is no harm in his telling others that he has met the Imam even while he is still alive.²⁵ Elsewhere, Ishtihārdī, after the citing the final *tawqīr*, contends that the claim of anyone who alleges to be the Mahdī, the gate to the Mahdī (*bābīyyat*), or to have seen the Imam (*mushāhadih*) is "invalid and rejected" (*bāṭil va mardūd*).²⁶

13. Javād Mu'allim, a contemporary Shī'ī scholar, attempts to reconcile the critical passage of the *tawqīr*, which declares anyone who claims to have seen the Imam a liar, with the many stories of ulama who claimed to have encountered the Hidden Imam in the modern period. Mu'allim translates the critical sentence of the *tawqīr* into Per-

23 Gulpāyigānī, *Imāmat va-mahdaviyyat*, 2:475; Gulpāyigānī, *Pāsukh-i dah pursish*, 65.

24 Gulpāyigānī, *Imāmat va-mahdaviyyat*, 2:45–6; see also Gulpāyigānī, *Iṣālat-i mahdaviyyat*, 55–70.

25 Ishtihārdī, *Ḥaḍrat-i Mahdī: Furūgh-i tābān-i wilāyat*, 95.

26 Ishtihārdī, *Bābīgarī va Bahā'īgarī: mawlūd-i mudda'iyān-i durūghīn-i niyābat-i khāṣṣ az imām-i zamān*, 19. In a footnote, Ishtihārdī comments that according to the interpretation of "some," by *mushāhadih* is meant those who claim to see the Imam, yet abuse this favor, "like those who have claimed to be the gate of the Imam (*bābīyyat*)."
Ishtihārdī, *Bābīgarī va Bahā'īgarī*, 19 n. 1.

sian as follows: “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 four emissaries (*sufarā*) wished to meet with the Imam, they could], is a liar and a charlatan.”²⁷

27 Nahāvandī, *Barakāt-i ḥaḍrat-i valī-i ‘aṣr*, 13–4 (from the introduction by Javād Mu’allim); see also idem, 74 n. 1. In a footnote, Mu’allim adds that in translating the *tawqī*, he used other hadiths/reports (*rivāyāt-i dīgarī*) on the same issue, but he does not provide any further information about these hadiths. Idem, 14 n. 1. In recent years, other writers have repeated al-Majlisī’s explanation, though they have not always given al-Majlisī credit. They include al-Shīrāzī, *Kalimat al-imām al-mahdī*, 203 n. 2, who claims that what the final *tawqī* actually negates is “constantly seeing [the Imam] and continually being in contact [with him]” (*al-mushāhada al-dā’ima wa-l-ittisāl al-mustamirr*); al-Mūsawī, *al-Arba’ūn fī l-mahdī*, 13; al-‘Aṭṭār, “Muqaddimat al-muḥaqqiq,” 22; al-Kawrānī, *al-Mu’jam al-mawḍū’ī*, 1102; al-Shāhrūdī, *al-Imām al-mahdī*, 176 n. 1; Āl ‘Uṣfūr, *Zāhirat al-ghayba wa-da’wā l-sifāra fī zill imāmat al-mahdī l-muntaẓar*, 20 (of the appendix); Khādīmī-Shīrāzī, *Tuḥfih-yi imām mahdī*, 138–40; al-Khazrajī, *Sufarā’ al-mahdī*, 258; Faqih, *Karāmāt al-imām al-mahdī*, 13 (referenced in Hage Ali, *Nationalism*, 152); Kamarīhī, *Davāzdahumūn*, sin-ḥā; Mutlaq, *The Last Luminary*, 39–42; and Ayatollah Muḥsin Arakī (b. 1956), who writes, “No one has the power to see Imam Mahdi in [the] 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 to see the Imam, but the possibility about someone’s contact with the Imam cannot be ruled out. There are people who have the blessing of having an audience with the Imam, and these [accounts] are usually mentioned in the authentic Shia books on ideology.” Araki, *Ideological and Jurisprudential Frontiers* (trans. Shīrāzī), 28–9. Ayatollah Arakī is a prominent Iraqi-born *mujtahid*, a prolific writer, and a politician. He is a current member (elected 2016) of the Assembly of Experts, has previously served as Ayatollah Khāmīnī’s personal representative in London, and, since 2012, heads the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, an organization that seeks to promote rapprochement among Islamic sects and legal schools. Ayatollah ‘Alī Karīmī Jahrumī gives a different interpretation of the “lying impostor” passage of the final *tawqī*. Rather than disallowing others from claiming to be the Imam’s representative, Jahrumī argues that the final *tawqī* sought to prevent the malicious from using their claim to encounter the Imam for selfish reasons. The curious example he gives is of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (d. 1980), the former shah of Iran who, according to Jahrumī, “in his writings formally claimed to have seen the Imam of the Age and has spoken about this in his speeches.” Al-Jahrumī, *Mahdī muqtadā-yi masīh*, 108, 111. I am not aware of any evidence to support this claim.

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- [After he enters into *ghayba* ... the Qā'im's] "body will not be seen and he will not called by his name until all of creation sees him, his name is announced, and [everyone] hears it" 45
- [After the Imam enters into hiding,] "no eye will see him until every person and every eye sees him ..." 47 n.121
- "As for Joseph, his brothers spoke with him and paid homage to him but could not recognize him" 52
- "By God, the earth will continue to have a Proof (*hujja*) [i.e., an Imam] ..." 25 n.9
- [A caller (cf. Quran 50:41) will proclaim to the world:] "This is the Mahdī, the caliph of God! Follow him!" 42 n.102
- "... except the *mawlā* who is in charge of his [the Imam's] affairs ..." 72, 75-7, 119
- "O God, befriend him who befriends [ʿAlī] and be an enemy to those who show enmity toward him" 77 n.103
- "Gracious God! The Messenger of God died, but Mūsā [al-Kāẓim] cannot die?" 39 n.88
- [Al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, when asked where to look for his successor should something happen to him, answered,] "in Medina" 61
- "He who dies without having an Imam [var., without having known (or recognized) his Imam] ..." 1 n.4
- "[The Hidden Imam] moves from east to west, listening to the people and greeting them. He sees but is not seen ..." 46
- "I asked [Imam al-Bāqir] about this *amr*, when will he appear?" 26
- "If your Imam vanishes, who will bring you an Imam like him?" 32
- [The Imam] "will be concealed from his Shīʿa and his closest friends/initiates ..." 45
- [The Imam] "will not appear to them [i.e., his followers], and they will not know his location ..." 46
- "I never leave the earth bereft of a *walī* ..." 24
- "I swear by God, beside whom there is no other God, that [al-Kāẓim] perished (*halaka*)!" 39
- [Al-Kāẓim classified humanity into three categories:] "the true genuine Arab, the *mawlā*, and the uncouth (*ʿilj*) [person] ..." 76-7
- [The Mahdī will depart from Medina] "‘fearful and vigilant’ until he arrives in Mecca" 30 n.44
- "The master of this *amr* will be forced into *ghayba* ..." 54
- "The master of this *amr* will be forced into isolation ..." 55-6
- "The master of this *amr* will be missed for a time ..." 48 n.127
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- "The master of this *amr* will have two *ghaybas* ... No one will know his location ..." [with two variations] 72-4
- "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" 44-5
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- "... none will see him" Or, "his body/person/corporeal form will not be seen" 46-7
- "The people said to the Messenger of God: 'O Messenger of God! Will we see our Lord on the Day of Resurrection?' ..." 46 n.117
- "Praise be to God who did not cause me to leave the world before ..." 42 n.102
- [The Prophet foretells the coming of] "the concealed one who will appear after a lengthy *ghayba*" 30

- [The prophetic precedent of Joseph, which the Qā'im will manifest, is] "*ghayba* from his family such that he will not recognize them and they, in turn, will be unable to recognize him" 52 n.138
- [The Prophet said that 'Alī and eleven of 'Alī's descendants] "are like me except that they are not prophets" 24 n.4
- "The Qā'im must go into hiding ..." 54 n.9
- "The Qā'im [who will appear] from my descendants is like the Hour [of the Day of Judgment]" 94 n.58
- "[The Qā'im] will proclaim a *dīn* that has been effaced, manifest a truth that was hidden, and fearlessly rise through the power of Truth/God ..." 27
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- "... solitude is a mode of worshiping (God)" 57 n.25
- "There are three categories of people: those who possess knowledge, those who seek knowledge, and the flotsam (*ghuthā'*) ..." 77 n.104
- [There will be one *ghayba* that will last] "six days, six months, or six years ..." 45
- "This verse [Quran 67:30] has been revealed about the Qā'im (*nazalat fī l-qā'im*). When your Imam vanishes, you will not know where he is. Who then will bring you an unconcealed Imam? ..." 32
- "Were it not for the learned (*'ulamā'*) who will live after the *ghayba* of your Qā'im ..." 28
- "[When he appears], the Qā'im will take out a book (*kitāban*) which has been sealed with a golden seal ..." 64 n.52
- "[When] a man from among my descendants appears at the end of time ..." 56 n.20
- "When the fifth descendant of the seventh goes missing (*fuqīda*) ..." 48 n.127
- "[While pointing toward the region of Dhū Ṭuwā, al-Bāqir said,] the master of this *amr* will hide in one of these gorges ..." 35
- "In the year 260 [873–4], my Shī'a will become divided (*yaftariq shī'atī*)" 87
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