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Shi'ism

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Shi'ism is one of the two major denominational divisions among Muslims, the other being the Sunnīs. The adherents of Shi'ism are referred to as Shī'īs or Shi'ites, and Shī'a may be used as a collective term. The original name in Arabic is *shī'at 'Alī*, the partisans of 'Alī. The Shī'a constitute approximately 15 percent of the world Muslim population today. They are divided into several sub-groups, particularly the "Twelvers," "Seveners" or Ismā'īlīs, and the "Fivers" or Zaydīs. This chapter will give primary attention to the Twelvers, who recognize twelve Imāms (authoritative leaders) and who form the vast majority of Shī'īs today. They predominate in Iran and form significant minorities elsewhere, most prominently in Iraq and Lebanon. Brief attention will be given the Zaydīs and Ismā'īlīs at the end.

Early history

The accounts on which our knowledge of the first three centuries of Shī'ī history is based are often obscure and conflicting. In the view of many modern secular historians Twelver Shi'ism comes clearly to light only at the end of this period. The following account derives largely but not exclusively from traditional Shī'ī sources.

During his lifetime the prophet Muḥammad was the political leader of the Muslim community (*umma*) as he was its guide in other areas of its life. With his death the issue immediately arose as to who should succeed to his political role. Many believed that Muḥammad had not designated any particular successor and, in a rather disorganized meeting, one of his earliest converts and closest lieutenants, Abū Bakr, was chosen as his successor or *khalīfa* (caliph). Others, however, believed that Muḥammad had in fact chosen a successor, his cousin and son-in-law, 'Alī, the son of Abū Ṭālib, at a place called Ghadīr Khumm, a few months before his death. Moreover, 'Alī was Muḥammad's closest male relative and a man of sincerity and courage. After initial protests, however, 'Alī and his followers, in the interests of communal peace, refrained from pushing his claims against the caliphate of Abū Bakr and his successors, 'Umar and 'Uthmān.

Increasing dissatisfaction during 'Uthmān's rule led to his assassination, and in this context 'Alī was chosen as caliph by the people of Medina in 656. Powerful elements, however, opposed him. In the Battle of the Camel (656) his army defeated two powerful Meccan leaders. More serious was the opposition of Mu'āwiya, the governor of Syria and scion of the prominent Umayyad family, whose father had opposed Muḥammad until almost the end. He alleged that 'Alī had been implicated in the death

of ʿUthmān, a kinsman of his, and that revenge should be exacted. Their armies met at Ṣiffīn (657), but when the battle was going ʿAlī's way the followers of Muʿāwiya successfully called for arbitration. This arbitration went against ʿAlī, and he refused to accept it, but Muʿāwiya, a shrewd and pragmatic politician, was soon gaining the upper hand against him. Meanwhile, a group of ʿAlī's supporters who opposed the arbitration defected and campaigned against both sides. These were known as the Khawārij (singular: Khārijī or Kharijite, seceder or rebel) and gave rise to several related sectarian movements in the years to come. ʿAlī defeated the Khawārij in battle but in 661 one of them assassinated him, and Muʿāwiya went on to establish the Umayyad (or Umawī) dynasty, which continued until 750. It is worth noting that two of the leading women of early Islam played important roles on opposite sides of this conflict. ʿĀʾisha, the youngest and favorite wife of Muḥammad and daughter of Abū Bakr, disliked ʿAlī and was involved against him in the Battle of the Camel. Fāṭima, the daughter of Muḥammad, was the wife of ʿAlī, and considered that she was wronged by Abū Bakr, who denied her an inheritance from Muḥammad.

According to the Shīʿa, ʿAlī had designated his son, Ḥasan, as his successor. Ḥasan, however, was in a very weak position, and so abdicated in favor of Muʿāwiya in order to avoid useless bloodshed. He retired to a quiet life until his death in 669 but in the Shīʿī view he continued to be the legitimate ruler or Imām. After his death his younger brother, Ḥusayn, became Imām. He too remained quiet until Muʿāwiya was succeeded by his son, Yazīd, who is pictured, especially by Shīʿīs, as exceedingly corrupt and immoral. In 680, responding to calls for help from the people of Kufa, in Iraq, Ḥusayn set forth from Mecca, where he had been living, with a small band of some 72 loyal followers. They were met by an Umayyad army of several thousand at Karbalāʾ, on the way to Kufa, and in the ensuing battle Ḥusayn and his men were all savagely slaughtered, while the women and children were taken prisoners to Damascus, the Umayyad capital. This defeat was to play a major and distinctive role in Shīʿī religious consciousness and its anniversary is commemorated on ʿĀshūrā, the 10th day of Muḥarram, the first month of the Muslim year.

Among the prisoners was Ḥusayn's young son, ʿAlī, who is known as Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn ("Ornament of the Worshippers") and recognized by Shīʿīs as the fourth Imām. He led a life of pious seclusion and had contact with only a few followers. He avoided involvement in the political movements of his time from which Fiver Shiʿism emerged. He died in 712 or 713. His son, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, is recognized as the fifth Imām. He, too, remained politically quiescent but was active as a teacher and began the dissemination of Shīʿī scholarship. He died between 732 and 743. His son, who became the sixth Imām, known as Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, was an even greater scholar and teacher than his father and is credited with being the founder of the Twelver Shīʿī school of *fiqh*, known as Jaʿfarī *fiqh*. During his time the Umayyad dynasty was replaced by the Abbasids, under whom he suffered more persecution than before, although they claimed connection with the Prophet's family and had initially appealed to Shīʿī sentiment. He died in 765.

The death of Jaʿfar occasioned a dispute over the succession. He had designated his son, Ismāʿīl, as his successor but Ismāʿīl died during his father's lifetime. Some claimed that the succession should continue through Ismāʿīl's descendants and these became the Ismāʿīlīs. The group we know as Twelvers, however, hold that after Ismaʿil's death Jaʿfar designated another son, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, who became the seventh Imām. He

suffered considerable persecution at the hands of the Abbasids and, died, it is said, by poisoning, in 799. The eighth Imām was ʿAlī al-Riḍā, whom the then ruling Abbasid caliph appointed to be his successor, for reasons debated by historians. ʿAlī al-Riḍā died, however, in 818 before al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–33), and Shīʿī historians accuse al-Maʾmūn of changing his mind and poisoning him. ʿAlī al-Riḍā's sister, Fāṭima Maʿṣūma, was revered in her own right and her shrine in Qum is the most important one in that city, which has been and is a major center of Shīʿī learning. The ninth Imām, Muḥammad al-Taqī, succeeded his father while still a child and died while still in his twenties, in 835. There are reports of his precocious knowledge. The tenth Imām, ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Hādī, or al-Naqī, also succeeded to the imamate as a child. He died in 868. During his time the Abbasid rulers began to persecute Shīʿīs again after a period of relative tolerance.

The eleventh Imām, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, was under detention or in hiding during the whole of his six-year imamate, and was accessible to only a few of his followers. When he died, in 873 or 874, there was considerable disagreement about whether he had left an heir and what should be done. According to the Twelver view, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī designated his young son, Muḥammad, who upon his father's death went into occultation (*ghayba*, absence) and communicated with the world only through a chosen deputy (*nāʾib*). This was the "Minor Occultation" (*ghayba sughrā*), during which there were four successive deputies. In 941 even this communication ended and the Imām entered the "Greater Occultation" (*ghayba kubrā*), which will end only when he reappears as the *mahdī* and "will fill the earth with equity and justice as it has been filled with oppression and tyranny" (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1975: 211, translation modified).

Although he is in occultation, he is still the true and legitimate ruler of the world, and is given titles such as *imām al-ʿaṣr* ("Leader of the age") and *ṣāḥib al-zamān* ("Master of the time").

Later history

The Greater Occultation represents a major watershed in the history of Twelver Shiʿism, since the community was now deprived of the kind of guidance on which its claims to authority and its distinctiveness were based. It is also the point where the community begins to appear more clearly in the historical sources and from which the earliest surviving writings attributed to the Twelvers date.

In most places and at most times during their later history, as during the earlier period, the Twelvers have been a politically quiescent and oft-suffering minority, but there have been significant exceptions. Very soon after the Greater Occultation, the Shīʿī Būyid (also spelled Buwayhid) family came to power as viziers of the Abbasid caliphs in Iraq (945–1055) and, even after them, Shīʿīs sometimes had influence at court. Another Shīʿī family, the Hamdānids, took control in Syria (944–1003) and there were other Shīʿī dynasties in parts of Syria and Iraq until about 1150. While it is not totally clear whether the Shiʿism of all of these was of the Twelver form, life under them was congenial for Twelvers, and this period witnessed a flourishing of their scholarship, under figures such as Ibn Bābūya (*c.* 918–91) (also spelled Ibn Bābawayh), Shaykh al-Mufīd (*c.* 948–1022) and Shaykh al-Ṭāʾifa (955–1067), who set the main lines their doctrine would take in the future. Before them, al-Kulaynī (d. *c.* 939) had written the earliest authoritative collection of Shīʿī tradition (*ḥadīth*).

Under the Mongols, who conquered Baghdad in 1258 and ended the Abbasid Caliphate, the Twelvers suffered less than did the Sunnīs as many of the Mongol rulers and their successors were sympathetic to Shi'ism. One, Öljeitü (also spelled Ūljāytū; r. 1304–16), converted to Shi'ism. The great Shī'ī scholar and philosopher, Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201–74), was an advisor to the Mongol conqueror, Hülegü Khān, and his student, 'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 1325), was a key figure in the development of *fiqh*.

Ismā'īl (d. 1524), the leader of the Ṣafawī Ṣūfī order, invaded Iran in 1500 and became Shah (king), and declared Twelver Shi'ism the state religion. He claimed descent from the seventh Imān and also the status of "perfect master" and divine manifestation, claims inconsistent with Twelver thinking. These claims were dropped by his successors, who ruled as (fallible) deputies of the Hidden Imām. Twelver Shi'ism was so weak in Iran at the time that it was necessary to bring in scholars from Arab areas to instruct the people. This work was done so well, however, that Iran became the major bastion of Shi'ism that it still is today. If one seeks evidence that religion can be imposed by force of authority, Safavid Iran provides it. The scholars (*'ulamā'*, sing. *'ālim*) also claim to be deputies of the Hidden Imām and the interplay between this claim and that of the Shahs has been a major feature of Iranian religion and politics since then, although in the Safavid period the Shahs held the upper hand. This period witnessed the greatest cultural flowering of Twelver Shi'ism, as can be seen in the impressive mosques and palaces of the capital, Isfahan. It also represented the height of Twelver political power, especially under Shāh 'Abbās I (r. 1587–1629). Scholarship prospered as a system of *madrasa*s (schools) was established. Probably the most influential scholar of the Safavid period was Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (1628–99), a scholar of *ḥadīth*, a popularizer of strict Shī'ī doctrine, an opponent of Sufism, and a major political force.

The Safavid dynasty ended in 1736 and an effort by the following ruler to impose Sunnī Islam failed. In 1796 the first Shah of the Qajar dynasty came to the throne. The dynasty was to last until 1925 but was never as strong as the Safavids had been and had to struggle against the growing power of European imperialism and the increasing influence of the *'ulamā'*. This situation was dramatically illustrated by the controversy over a tobacco monopoly granted by the Shah to an Englishman. A *fatwā* against the monopoly in 1891 by the leading *'ālim* of the day forced the Shah to retract it. The *'ulamā'* also participated in the Constitutional Revolution that began in 1906, but they were divided in their attitudes toward the constitution. In 1925 Reza Khan ended the Qajar dynasty and made himself the first Shah of the Pahlavi dynasty. While proclaiming his loyalty to Shi'ism and initially courting the *'ulamā'*, he shortly introduced secularizing reforms that curtailed their prerogatives and influence as much as possible. His ideology was Iranian nationalism, but Shi'ism was important as part of this, since it had come to distinguish Iran from other Muslim nations. When Reza was replaced in 1941 by his son, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, there was a decade of lively political activity in which explicitly religious approaches were represented by the politician and *'ālim*, Ayatollah Kashani, and by the extremist Fedayan-i Islam, who were responsible for several assassinations. Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadegh, under whom oil was nationalized in 1951, was personally pious but secular and nationalist in his politics. The Shah was briefly forced out but then returned to rule with a firm authoritarian hand.

In the following years the Shah destroyed or co-opted his secular opposition but also lost the confidence of the people, leaving the field open to several diverse religious ideologies, among both *'ulamā'* and laypeople. Among these one may discern three main tendencies. One, illustrated by Mehdi Bazargan, who was briefly prime minister after the Islamic Revolution, may be called liberal or modernist and interprets Islam largely in terms of Western liberal democracy. The second, prominently illustrated by 'Alī Sharī'atī (1933–77), who greatly influenced the students, interprets Shi'ism in terms of contemporary Third World revolutionary ideologies. The last, successfully articulated by Ayatollah Khomeini, who had earlier been exiled for his opposition to the Shah, combines a radically conservative Shī'ī vision with a call for social justice and opposition to imperialism. These tendencies and others stimulated the broad popular movement that toppled the Shah in 1979 under Khomeini's leadership and continue to contend with each other under the Islamic Republic that he founded. The popular designation of Khomeini as Imām, a title given to some leading *'ulamā'* in the Arab world but not previously in Iran, indicates the status he came to have. His main slogan and doctrine was *vilayat-i faqih* ("the governance of the jurisprudent"), effectively that the *'ulamā'* should take charge of government, something that had never happened before among Twelver Shī'īs or Sunnīs. This doctrine was enshrined in the 1979 constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, though its interpretation has changed somewhat, and the *'ulamā'* have played a major role in the government of the Republic. While the Republic has faced enormous economic and political problems, and there has been no lack of factionalism, so far this has been contained with the framework of the constitution and its ideology.

There are also significant Shī'ī populations in Arab countries, especially Iraq and Lebanon. The city of Kufa in Iraq was the early stronghold of Shi'ism and Iraq has had a significant Twelver population since then, constituting more than half the population of modern Iraq. Also, the most important shrines and many of the most important centers of learning are there, such as those at Karbala and Najaf. For most of the time, and certainly since the beginning of Ottoman rule there (sixteenth century), Sunnīs have ruled the country and Shī'īs have been more or less disadvantaged politically and economically. In the last century they have become more active politically. They played an important role in the rebellion against British rule following World War I and, encouraged by the Islamic revolution in Iran, they developed their own revolutionary movement, but this was brutally repressed by Saddam Hussein's government, which was Sunnī though secular. After his removal in 2003 Sunnī–Shī'ī tension developed into a virtual civil war in Iraq as Shī'īs demanded greater rights and effective representation in government.

There has also long been a significant Twelver population in Lebanon, which has also tended to be politically and economically disadvantaged. They have played their role in the confessional politics of the post-Ottoman period and they markedly increased their political strength under the leadership of Imām Mūsā al-Ṣadr from 1959 until his disappearance in Libya in 1978. During the civil war that began in 1975 the Amal party, founded by al-Ṣadr developed in a secularist direction and the radically Islamist and Iranian-influenced Hizbullah split off from it to become more popular and to mount effective guerrilla and suicide operations against American and Israeli military presences.

There are also significant Shī'ī populations in Bahrain and Eastern Saudi Arabia,

usually under Sunnī rule and, in the latter case, that of strongly anti-Shī'ī Wahhābīs, who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had sacked the Shī'ī shrine centers in Iraq. Shī'īs have had a significant presence in India since at least the fourteenth century and have sometimes had political influence or power. Over the last century there have been a number of clashes between Sunnīs and Shī'īs there, and since the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan, tension between Shī'īs and an increasingly Sunnī-oriented Pakistan government. Important Twelver populations are also found in Azerbaijan, among particular tribes in Afghanistan, in parts of East Africa and among Lebanese in West Africa, as well as in the diasporas of Europe, America and Australasia.

Main Twelver doctrines

Twelvers recognize five basic principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*): belief in divine unity (*tawḥīd*), prophecy (*nubuuwa*), resurrection (*maʿād*), imamate (*imāma*) and justice (*ʿadl*). On the principles of prophecy and resurrection they agree essentially with the Sunnīs. On the others they have generally held to the views associated with the Muʿtazilīs, the early rationalist school of Islamic theology, whose influence peaked in the ninth century. In particular they have held that God's justice demands that humans must have free will if they are to be recompensed for their deeds. Along with this belief in God's justice goes a strong sense of His demand for justice in human affairs and a belief that human reason can recognize the difference between justice and tyranny, in contrast to the view that whatever happens is God's will and must therefore be accepted as right.

The primary point of difference, however, is their doctrine of imamate, or leadership of the community. The Imām must be one of or descended from the *ahl al-bayt*, the immediate members of Muḥammad's family, and must be explicitly designated (*naṣṣ*) by his predecessor. This is necessary because the Imām is not just a capable and righteous political leader, but also a spiritual guide and doctrinal teacher. For this purpose he is *maʿṣūm*, divinely protected from error, as was Muḥammad himself. Shī'īs argue that God would not send an infallible prophet with an infallible scripture and then fail to provide an infallible leader to interpret and implement His revelation. There is, moreover in their view, a very important esoteric side to the Qur'ān that only the Imām can know and transmit. He is understood, moreover, to have a cosmic and mystical function, enshrining the primordial divine light and pre-existing the created universe. It is sometimes said that Shi'ism arose from the purely political struggles over the succession after Muḥammad, but, in fact, what was at issue was the divine guidance of the community (*umma*), both its nature and who would exercise it. It follows from this that one cannot be a true believer unless one recognizes and follows the Imām of his time. Others, as Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq stated, might be called Muslims but not believers.

Given these views, Shī'īs have a darker and more tragic view of history than Sunnīs. For Sunnīs, the early history of the *umma* is one of both spiritual and worldly success, though not without significant blemishes, especially after the period of the four "rightly guided" (*rāshidūn*) caliphs. For Shī'īs it is greatness gone disastrously wrong almost from the start. No sooner had Muḥammad died than his followers perversely rejected the rightful leader and chose a usurper, and then another and then a third.

The resulting corruption was such that when ʿAlī finally did come to power and tried to reform the situation, he was unable to do so and was soon killed. From this point on the Imāms were sidelined politically although they were able to carry out their teaching role for their followers and sometimes influence the larger community through their moral example and intellectual prowess. According to many Shīʿī accounts all of the Imāms except the twelfth were murdered, usually by Sunnī rulers. Finally the corruption reached such a depth that the Imām could no longer function in the world, and entered into occultation. The result is a marked tension between a high standard of piety and righteousness for the leaders and a dismal sense of the world as a place where such piety and righteousness is persecuted, as well as a desire for doctrinal certainty and absence of the only one who can provide it. This tension often develops into a lively eschatological expectation, as happened during the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which many saw, and still see, as a preparation for the return of the Twelfth Imām.

The beliefs about the third Imām, Ḥusayn, and the rituals connected with him exemplify the intensity of this feeling. By his suffering and death at Karbala Ḥusayn is seen as having gained the merit to intercede for his followers with God, although in more recent decades a new interpretation has come to the fore with thinkers such as ʿAlī Sharīʿatī: he is the great revolutionary who, by fighting for the right in a hopeless situation, de-legitimated tyranny for all time and inspired the desperate struggles of future revolutionaries. It was this interpretation, which undoubtedly owes something to Marxism, that has inspired the revolutionary and the reform movements of recent decades. Shīʿīs show their devotion to Ḥusayn in extremely emotional rituals, which include dramatic recitations of the events of his life, self-flagellation, and a "passion play" during the month of Muḥarram (*taʿziya*) which re-enacts the events of Karbala.

Not only Ḥusayn, however, but all of the Imāms, as well as Muḥammad and Fāṭima, are highly revered and events in their lives commemorated. They are all models for believers, as only Muḥammad is for Sunnīs. On the other hand, it has been common practice, at least until recently, to ritually curse the first three Sunnī caliphs as usurpers. Such cursing when done publicly, as well as the emotional Muharram rituals, have often occasioned clashes with Sunnīs. In line with their view of the world and in response to persecution suffered, Shīʿīs have practiced *taqiyya* (prudent dissimulation), disguising their views and even their identity in order to protect their community. This is viewed not only as permissible but sometimes obligatory. This has, unfortunately, tended to make Sunnīs suspicious of their real intentions in any attempted rapprochement.

Twelver law

Twelver legal practice (*fiqh*) is often referred to as Jaʿfarī, after the sixth Imām who first developed it in a major way and also influenced some of the early Sunnī scholars of *fiqh*. Over the last four centuries there have been two major schools of Twelver *fiqh*, the Akhbārīs and the Uṣūlīs, with the Uṣūlīs predominant for the last two centuries. Shīʿīs, like Sunnīs, accept the Qurʾān and the prophetic *sunna* as the sources of authority, but the Shīʿīs include in the *sunna* not only the *ḥadīth* of Muḥammad but also the *akhbār* (reports) of the Imāms. The Akhbārīs limit themselves to these two sources. The Uṣūlīs also accept *ijmāʿ* (consensus, though in a somewhat different way

from Sunnīs) and reason, and they stress the activity of *ijtihād* (interpretive effort) by the most qualified of the *'ulamā'*. The results are not infallible but are authoritative and in theory every believer who is not himself a *mujtahid* (one qualified to do *ijtihād*) must follow (*taqlīd*) someone who is. As a result a small number of scholars gather a following and become *marja'al-taqlīd*, "source of emulation" (*marja'-i taqlīd* in Persian) and are given the title Grand Ayatollah (*āyat Allāh 'uẓmā*). The term *āyat Allāh* (Ayatollah) means "sign of God" and at present is generally given to any *mujtahid*. It was hardly used before the twentieth century and, at first, only for *marja's*, but has become progressively more common. *Marja's* also receive a religious tax, *khums*, from their followers and this has enabled them in the twentieth century to build sizeable educational and social service institutions. Usually there have been several *marja's* at any one time, but on at least three occasions this authority has been concentrated in one person, including Ayatollah Shīrāzī at the time of the Tobacco Protest (1891–2) and Ayatollah Burūjirdī in the 1940s and 1950s. Ayatollah Khomeini was a *marja'* but never a sole *marja'*. The *marja's* exercised varying degrees of political influence, but only with the Islamic revolution in Iran and Khomeini's leadership of it did they either claim or exercise direct political power. Khomeini's doctrine of *vilāyat-i faqīh* explicitly extended their authority to this area. Khomeini's successor as leader, Ali Khamenei was not a *marja'* at the time he took over though he has since been recognized as such. He does not have the same kind of personal following as Khomeini did. Increased involvement in politics has made the role and identification of the *marjā'* more complex and less clear than it was.

In its content, Twelver *fiqh* does not radically differ from Sunnī *fiqh* at most points, though there is a greater concern for ritual purity. Distinctive to Shi'ism is the *khums*, a tax of one-fifth of one's income, one-half of which goes to the *sayyids*, the descendants of Muḥammad and the other half to the *'ulamā'* as the representatives of the Hidden *Imām*, and *mut'a* (temporary marriage).

Philosophy, mysticism, Sufism

The Greek philosophical tradition, much of which was translated into Arabic and then Islamicized and further developed by philosophers such as al-Fārābī (d. 950) and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) (980–1037), died out as a separate discipline in the Sunnī world after the twelfth century. It continued and developed in the Iranian Shī'ī world in a more mystical direction in the form of *'irfān* or *ḥikmat-i ilāhī* (divine wisdom), building on the writings and insights of "theosophists" such as al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) and Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240). Its greatest representative was Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640), whose teachings have been influential down to the present time. Being an intellectual mysticism it has been popular among many of the *'ulamā'* although it is looked on with suspicion by others. Khomeini was one of its practitioners and also taught it for a time, and this undoubtedly contributed to his charisma.

The early Ṣūfī movement, though having high regard for 'Alī, was generally Sunnī and in general Sufism has fitted better into the Sunnī than the Shī'ī order. Some general considerations may partly account for this. The cosmic role and authority of the *quṭb* ("axis" of the universe, highest of the Ṣūfī *walīs* or "saints") in much Ṣūfī thinking seems to conflict with that of the Imām in Shi'ism. Also the type of authority claimed by

Ṣūfī *shaykhs* generally complements that claimed by the Sunnī *ʿulamāʾ*, but it tends to compete with the greater personal authority claimed by *uṣūlī mujtahids*. Nevertheless, there has been and still is a significant Shīʿī Sufism. Beginning in about the fourteenth century, several initially Sunnī Ṣūfī orders evolved in a Shīʿī direction, such as some lines of the Kubrawiyya including the Dhahabīs and the Niʿmatullāhīs. The Safavids, who made Iran Shīʿī, also began as a Sunnī order. Although suffering suppression in the late Safavid period and generally opposed by the *ʿuṣūlī ʿulamāʾ*, several orders have continued to be active and even to have some following in ruling circles. The line of the Niʿmatullāhīs led by Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh has also expanded into the Western world.

Zaydīs

The Fiver Shīʿīs or Zaydīs developed in the context of several Shīʿī oriented rebellions in the late Umayyad period. As fifth Imām they recognize Zayd, a different son of Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn from the one recognized by the Twelvers. Zayd was killed in an unsuccessful revolt against the Umayyads in 740 and several later revolts against the Abbasids were considered to be Zaydī. There was a Zaydī state south of the Caspian Sea in northern Iran from about 913 until about 1032 and another Zaydī state was established in Yemen in 901 or earlier and continued until 1962. The Zaydīs accept the caliphates of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar on the grounds of expediency. Their Imām must be a descendant of ʿAlī and Fāṭima but beyond that no specific lineage or designation is required. He must be knowledgeable in religious matters and able to lead a successful revolt against unjust authorities. In *fiqh* they generally follow the (Sunnī) Ḥanafī school.

Ismāʿīlīs

According to the Ismāʿīlīs, or Seveners, the designation of Ismāʿīl by his father, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, remained valid even though Ismāʿīl died before his father, and the line of Imāms is believed to continue in Ismāʿīl's descendants down to the present time, with some uncertainty and dispute about the succession at certain points. These Imāms have sometimes been in concealment (*satr*) and sometimes visible, but when concealed they have had a visible spokesman, often called *ḥujja* (proof), and under him *dāʿīs* (propagators, missionaries), who led the movement in particular areas. Muḥammad the son of Ismāʿīl and the next few successors were in concealment (non-Ismāʿīlī historians have doubts about them).

Around 900 an Ismāʿīlī-led rebellion, known as Qarmaṭī (or Carmatian), took place in Syria and Iraq and lasted for some decades. Another movement by the same name in Bahrain and eastern Arabia adopted the Ismāʿīlī cause and established a republic that lasted until 1078. At one point they carried off the Black Stone from the Kaʿba in Mecca (they viewed the devotion given to it as idolatrous).

In 909 a claimant to the Ismāʿīlī succession took power in Tunis and proclaimed himself *mahdī* and caliph of all Muslims. This movement, known as Fatimid, extended its power over North Africa and took Egypt in 969, building Cairo as its capital. Strong militarily, economically and culturally, the Fatimids posed a major material and spiritual challenge to the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. It was under them that

the Azhar mosque/university was built. The Qarmaṭīs did not recognize them but *dāʿīs* in Syria and Iraq did until 1094, when they recognized a claimant to the succession, al-Nizār, not recognized in Egypt. There, the Fatimid dynasty followed his brother al-Mustaʿlī (r. 1094–1101) and the dynasty continued until 1171, when it was replaced by the Sunnī rule of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin). Its later Imāms gave rise to two groups, the Mustaʿlīs and the Ṭayyibīs, due to a succession crisis in 1130. Meanwhile, Syrian followers of the Fatimid Imām al-Ḥākim (r. 996–1021), who had disappeared but was viewed as a manifestation of deity, became the Druze sect.

The Nizārīs, even before breaking with the Fatimids, had established themselves at Alamut in the Daylam mountains under the leadership of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (r. 1090–1124), who claimed to be the *ḥujja* of the Imām. Under him they mounted a decentralized revolutionary effort against the Abbasid rule whose main tactic was the public assassination of key leaders, a tactic which eventually made them feared and hated. The West knows them as "the Assassins," a name deriving from their alleged use of hashish. By about 1120 the revolution had reached a stalemate. In later years their leaders claimed to be Imāms and they went through several striking doctrinal transformations before the material basis of their power was destroyed when the Mongols captured Alamut in 1256. For some centuries afterwards they survived taking the form of a Ṣūfī *ṭarīqa*, appearing openly again in the nineteenth century when their leader shifted to Bombay, which has been their center since then. Today they are a generally prosperous and peaceful community spread throughout the world, linked by their allegiance to the Aga Khan, as their leader is known.

In general, Ismāʿīlī thinking and practice has been strongly hierarchical and esoteric, carrying the idea of *taqiyya* much further than others do. It has also stimulated and encouraged intellectual speculation. Ismāʿīlīs developed distinctive and complex doctrines considerably influenced by Hellenistic philosophy as well as by other pre-Islamic traditions. In turn it contributed, sometimes by provoking reaction, to the larger Islamic intellectual tradition. For example, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ developed an impressive defense of the Imāms which the Sunnī thinker, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), undertook to refute, but in so doing his own thinking was influenced.

Sunnī–Shīʿī "ecumenicism"?

Although recent political events have underscored and exacerbated tensions between Sunnīs and Shīʿīs, there has also been a significant rapprochement under the conditions of modernity and in the face of Western presence. The prominent nineteenth-century reformer, Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī Asadābādī (1838/9–1897), was an Iranian Shīʿī who was active in both Sunnī and Shīʿī worlds. The Indian Muslim leaders, Syed Ameer Ali (1849–1926), Abdullah Yusuf Ali (d. 1953), the translator of the Qurʾān, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), the leader of the movement for Pakistan, all had Shīʿī family backgrounds (Ismāʿīlī in the latter two cases). Among the examples of official rapprochement, in 1951 the *ʿulamāʾ* of the Azhar declared Jaʿfarī *fiqh* to be a valid school of *fiqh* alongside the four Sunnī schools. In 2005 an International Islamic Conference held in Jordan, basing itself on *fatwās* by several prominent *ʿulamāʾ*, declared that Sunnīs, Twelvers, Zaydīs and Ibāḍīs (a branch of the Khawārij) are to be considered true Muslims.

An interestingly ambivalent case is that of the Iranian Revolution. The rhetoric of the

revolutionary leaders often spoke of Sunnīs and Shīʿīs as brothers and Khomeini had positive things to say about Abū Bakr and ʿUmar (Khomeni 1981: 57). Yet the revolution was distinctively Shīʿī, relying as it did on the distinctive authority of the Shīʿī *ʿulamāʾ* and the distinctive passions aroused by Ḥusayn. It has attempted to influence Sunnīs but, in fact, has directly influenced mainly Shīʿī populations. Equally ambivalent is the Iraqi situation, where there is a virtual civil war between Shīʿī and Sunnī elements but significantly a degree of cooperation also. A grim but probably apt symbol of the current situation is the journalist, Atwar Bahjat, daughter of Sunnī and Shīʿī parents, murdered by a death squad whose sectarian identity has never been discovered.

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