I

The Rise of the Agents in the Late Imamate (830–874 CE)

EXPECTATIONS OF SUCCESSION

What were the beginnings of the central institutions of the Imami Shiʿi Imamate? While they are not identical with the Imamate itself, we must assume that they developed alongside it. By the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, expectations of an unbroken succession of Imams were strong enough that when the Imam died without heir, even the idea of a hidden Imam was preferable to life without an Imam. We cannot trace this kind of expectation of unbroken father-to-son succession back before the sixth Imam of the canonical sequence, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. The history of the emergence of the Imamate as an institution, rather than a theology, has yet to be written, but even using the hints provided by the rather abstract systematizations of succession presented by the heresiographers, we can identify the lifetime of Ṣādiq as crucial. The pivotal role of Ṣādiq's charisma rooted in his wisdom and piety is attested to by both Shiʿi and non-Shiʿi sources which preserve narratives about his life.[1] The Shiʿi heresiographer al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī tells us that after the death of the fifth Imam, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the Imam's followers split into two parties. One party followed Bāqir's son Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, and the other followed the claim of a man from a different branch of the family, the Ḥasanid Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, who led a revolt in

---

[1] Scholars have agreed that Ṣādiq's Imamate was a foundational moment. See especially, Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shîʿa Become Sectarian?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75, no. 1 (1955): 1–13; Haider, *Origins*; Ansari, *L'imamat*, introduction; Robert Gleave, "Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq," *EIr*.

Medina.[2] It is important to note that this split was not between sons of an
"Imam," indicating that later Imami sensibilities about succession as being
confined within a canonical lineage were not yet dominant. The field was
much wider, including other men of the family of ʿAlī who appeared to be
model leaders. The development of the understandings of the Imamate in
the second/eighth century is still open to debate. Crone suggests that, as
even the sons of Ṣādiq supported the revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, this
throws doubt on whether they even recognized Ṣādiq's Imamate, while
Gleave suggests that Ṣādiq did indeed understand himself to be the legit-
imate Imam.[3] Although many among the Shiʿa clearly continued to be
open to the calls from leaders of various branches of the prophetic family,
Imami heresiographical memory indicates that a new conception of
Imamic succession had gained traction by the time Ṣādiq died in 148/
765. Nawbakhtī and Saʿd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qummī enumerate six splits
to have emerged after Ṣādiq's death. Central to the formation of these
splits are disputes about which of Ṣādiq's sons should be seen as upholding
his legacy.[4] This is a new phenomenon. Ṣādiq appears to have inaugurated
a new kind of father-to-son Imamate which generated new expectations
about succession which thereafter became a distinctive feature of the
Imami Imamate. The canonical conception of an unbroken line of
Twelve Imams from ʿAlī to the Mahdī is, therefore, historically problem-
atic, and unless talking about canonical Twelver doctrine, historians
should quit their bad habit of referring to these twelve men as "the
Imams" as if they were Imams all in the same sense. This insight was
articulated in 1955 by Hodgson,[5] but still we await a historical study of
the emergence of the Imamiyya which ventures beyond doctrinal history.
This is not my aim here, but we should understand that the Imamiyya came

---

[2] Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shīʿa*, ed. Helmut Ritter
(Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-dawla li-jamʿiyat al-mustashriqīn al-almāniya, 1350/1931), 53–55.

[3] Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press,
2004), 114; Gleave, "Jaʿfar al-Ṣādeq," *EIr.*

[4] There is, of course, a problem with relying on heresiographical accounts, in that they tell us
relatively little about historical inheritance and succession practices within the ʿAlid clan,
and everything about how they were interpreted theologically by the followers of these
men, usually retrospectively, though the formulations recorded may preserve earlier posi-
tions. Without contrary evidence, however, we may accept the disputes over succession to
Ṣādiq as being based on historical events, while the interpretation may often have changed
afterward.

[5] See Hodgson's discussion of the *naṣṣ* Imamate, "Early Shîʿa," 10–11. For the intellectual
context of the concept of *naṣṣ* designation, see Rodrigo Adem, "Classical *Naṣṣ* Doctrines in
Imāmī Shîʿism: On the Usage of an Expository Term," *Shii Studies Review* 1, no. 1–2
(2017): 42–71.

into being gradually, and cannot be said to truly exist as an object of study before Ṣādiq.[6]

Succession between Imams *qua* heads of the family must have been largely based on internal family practice. However, the establishment of the seeds of a stable, heritable Imamate after Ṣādiq was accompanied by the development of a theological definition of Imamate. Thus, it was during the Imamate of Ṣādiq's son Mūsā al-Kāẓim that systematic elaborations of Imamate were produced by thinkers like Hishām b. al-Ḥakam in dialogue with the major intellectual schools present in early ʿAbbasid Iraq.[7] The positions that emerged from these debates formed the foundation of the Imamiyya as a clearly defined *theological* faction. The Imamate came to be defined as an unbroken line, transferred through the *naṣṣ*: the articulation of succession by an Imam (rather than public acclamation) from father to son, in the lineage of al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī. It is very likely that the sons of Ṣādiq who were engaged in the dispute over succession asserted their claims in language which shared some of the characteristics of theological discourse; however, the systematic claims that there was an unbroken succession formalized through acts of explicit designation from the time of Muḥammad's designation of ʿAlī through each successive Imam appear to be the product of scholarly elaborations of Imamate, rather than the clan politics.[8] While the partial autonomy of intellectual debates must be acknowledged, it is impossible that Hishām b. al-Ḥakam and his peers could have fabricated the theologized protocols of the Imamate out of whole cloth. We must assume that expectations had existed about succession for a generation or two, becoming sharper in particular at the time of the controversy about succession upon Ṣādiq's death. Here we can make a division between practical inheritance arrangements of the family, and the theological elaboration of these arrangements which must have come afterward. Van Ess suggests that the doctrine of the *naṣṣ* articulation of succession was preceded by the institution of the *waṣiyya* testament,[9] but the extent to which these doctrinal

---

[6] Ansari defines the Imamiyya as the followers of Ṣādiq, in particular those who were neither Zaydi nor Wāqifīs who stopped with the Imamate of Kāẓim. *L'imamat, xix*.

[7] Wilferd Madelung, "Hishām b. al-Ḥakam," *EI2*; Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*, vol. 1, *A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 410–48.

[8] Adem has argued that the appearance of the concept of the *naṣṣ* articulation was a borrowing from inter-sectarian theological and *uṣūlī* debates about hermeneutic methodology for determining the fact of a succession statement. Adem, "*Naṣṣ*."

[9] "The precursor of the *naṣṣ* was the *waṣiyya*, succession based on a testamentary appointment. At first nothing more was probably meant by this than the line of transmission in the family, and certainly not an explicit appointment." Van Ess, *Theology*, 446.

arrangements were indeed rooted in inheritance practices has not be studied. The arguments of theology and the practicalities of familial politics continue to operate side by side over the next several generations of Imams, often with conflicting assumptions. Thus, for example, the increasingly widespread assertion among some Imamis that "there can be no succession between brothers, except in the case of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn" was repeatedly challenged by fraternal claimants to the Imamate from the death of Ṣādiq right up until the death of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī.[10]

INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND PERSONNEL UNDER ṢĀDIQ

Ṣādiq's Imamate was a turning point in ways beyond the institutions and doctrines of succession. Ṣādiq's lifetime seems to have afforded an embryonic moment of mobilization which provided frameworks within which the institutionalization of the Imamate was later to occur. It is during Ṣādiq's lifetime that we first clearly see two key developments. First, he developed a cohort of men who were entrusted with collecting money on his behalf. Mushegh Asatryan has shown how Ṣādiq is depicted as having intentionally surrounded himself with wealthy and influential men, including a group of moneychangers who could get access to large sums when needed.[11] Secondly, the hadith ascribed to Ṣādiq begin to show evidence of a systematic effort to justify the collection of money in the Imam's name through normative legal and exegetical rulings.[12] What did Ṣādiq need to collect money for? The collection of alms taxes such as the *zakāt-ṣadaqa* was potentially a subversive act in its assumption of authority that paralleled that of the state. Sijpesteijn has shown from papyri that *zakāt* was still being actively collected by the state, at least in Egypt, in the early to mid-eighth century.[13] Ṣādiq is usually remembered as a political quietist, though Amikam Elad has discussed some reports that suggest that the authorities viewed him as a threat, in part due to his revenue-collection

---

[10] Most notably Jaʿfar "the Liar," the brother of Imam ʿAskarī. See Chapters 2 and 3.

[11] See Mushegh Asatryan, "Bankers and Politics: The Network of Shiʿi Moneychangers in Eighth-Ninth Century Kufa and Their Role in the Shiʿi Community," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 7 (2014): 1–21.

[12] See Edmund Hayes, "Alms and the Man: Finance and Resistance in the Legal Statements of the Shiʿi Imams," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 17 (2017): 293–94. Ṣādiq's statements thus contrast with those of his father, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, which are more concerned with the defense of the financial rights of the family of the Prophet more generally.

[13] Petra Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 195, 181–214.

activities.[14] Ṣādiq's collection of revenue should perhaps be seen as part of an implicit challenge to the religio-institutional legitimacy of the status quo, and therefore associated with the claims of the broader Hāshimite opposition to the caliphate of the Umayyads, and thereafter the ʿAbbāsids. In addition to fulfilling the functions of a just state in the absence of a just caliph, we may hypothesize that Ṣādiq was interested in furthering his political influence without military ambitions, a motive that would have been furthered by controlling large sums of money (whether for his own use, or for redistribution as alms).

FORMALIZATION OF THE REVENUE-COLLECTION NETWORK AFTER ṢĀDIQ, AND THE DETENTE WITH THE ʿABBĀSIDS

While we have evidence for Ṣādiq having received money from his followers, it is with the Imamate of his son Mūsā al-Kāẓim that we see the fiscal agents play an increasingly important role in the internal politics of the Imamate. When Kāẓim died, a group of his agents refused to recognize his son ʿAlī al-Riḍā as his successor and withheld large sums of money collected in the Imam's name. This shows three things: that Kāẓim had indeed been collecting money from his followers, that he had appointed agents to do so, and that the institutional expectations of the Imamate were such that money collected for one Imam was now being claimed for his successor (rather than, for example, being divided up according to the laws of inheritance, or remaining in the donor-community).[15] The existence of this Wāqifa group that "stopped" at Kāẓim, insisting that he lived on in Occultation as the rightful Imam, is widely attested, and became a standard topic of Shiʿi heresiography. The Wāqifa sect continues to exist as an influential splinter group at least until the fourth/tenth century.[16] The story of the Wāqifī agents withholding money from Riḍā, then, appears to offer a clear corroboration of those hadith reports that indicate the increasing institutionalization of revenue collection.[17] In comparison, we hear no mention of money delivered or withheld as part of the succession

---

[14] Amikam Elad, *The Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in 145/762: Ṭālibīs and Early ʿAbbāsīs in Conflict* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 460–63. More work on the historicity of such reports is required.

[15] This would be a real option given that many funds may have been canonical Islamic duties such as *khums* and *zakāt*, though it is very difficult to know exactly to what extent these categories were stable by this time.

[16] Mehmet Ali Buyukkara, "The Schism in the Party of Mūsā al-Kāẓim and the Emergence of the *Wāqifa*," *Arabica* 47 (2000): 95.

[17] Hayes, "Economic Actors."

controversy at the time of Ṣādiq. Riḍā is the subject of a couple of interesting hadith reports in which he is asked for a dispensation from paying dues, a request which he vigorously rejects, reasserting the intergenerational continuity of the fiscal network of the Imamate.[18]

At about the same time that the institutionalization of the fiscal network was proceeding apace under the Imams Kāẓim and Riḍā, a great shift was occurring in ʿAbbasid-Imami relations. Since the ʿAbbasid revolution, which appeared to realize Shiʿi hopes for rule by the family of the Prophet, these hopes had quickly soured as the ʿAbbasids moved to protect their own clan, rather than supporting the claims of any other Hāshimite houses.[19] Although the Imamis are often characterized as politically quietist, this should be considered a characterization best applied to the crystallized classical political theology of the Imami Shiʿa, rather than an obligation that was binding upon the political activity of the historical Imams. Thus, in apparent contrast to the political orientation of Ṣādiq, his son Kāẓim appears to have sympathized with and perhaps encouraged political and military mobilization against the ʿAbbasids,[20] and two of Kāẓim's sons actively led revolts, one in Arabia temporarily succeeding in establishing his rule over a region of Yemen, and another in Basra.[21] If the reports about the activist sympathies of Kāẓim are to be believed,[22] this might explain his particular interest in developing the institutions for the collection of funds. The great shift toward the establishment of a quietist Imamate came thereafter, with another son of Kāẓim, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, who, toward the end of his life, was favored by an ʿAbbasid administration made fragile by the fourth civil war. Riḍā was granted the status of heir apparent by the caliph Maʾmūn (Figure 1), though he died before he was able to succeed to the caliphate.[23] It is perhaps this ʿAbbasid involvement that set

---

[18] Ibid.

[19] For a recent treatment of this process, which shows the revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya as a turning point in ʿAbbasid-ʿAlid relations, see Deborah G. Tor, "The Parting of Ways between ʿAlid Shiʿism and Abbasid Shiʿism: An Analysis of the Missives between the Caliph al-Manṣūr and Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 6, no. 2 (2019): 209–27.

[20] Etan Kohlberg, "Mūsā al-Kāẓim," *EI2*.

[21] See Robert Gleave, "The Rebel and the Imam: The Uprising of Zayd al-Nār and Shiʿi Leadership Claims," in *The ʿAbbasid and Carolingian Empires*, ed. Deborah G. Tor (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 169–87.

[22] See chapter 3 of Najam Haider, *The Rebel and the Imām in Early Islam: Explorations in Muslim Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Haider argues that depictions of Kāẓim emphasize fear and persecution more in the early Occultation period, in keeping with the zeitgeist, while a more assertive, belligerent side of the Imam's image is highlighted in the more confident atmosphere of the Twelvers during the Buyid era and beyond.

[23] For interpretations of the designation of Riḍā, see Wilferd Madelung, "New Documents concerning al-Maʾmūn, al-Faḍl b. Sahl, and ʿAlī al-Riḍā," in *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for Iḥsān ʿAbbās on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī (Beirut: American

Riḍā apart as particularly honored among the descendants of Ṣādiq, and established the prestige of his lineage in contrast to a more belligerent son of Kāẓim like Ibrāhīm "the Butcher." It is notable that Riḍā continued to have particular prestige among Imams,[24] and even up to the time of al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī the Imam was known as "Ibn al-Riḍā" at court.[25] Riḍā's son Muḥammad al-Jawād married into the ʿAbbasid family.[26] Though Riḍā and Jawād both appear to have continued collecting money from their followers,[27] it appears less likely that they would have intended to use these

FIGURE 1 Dirham naming of ʿAlī al-Riḍā as heir to ʿAbbasid caliph Maʾmūn

The text of this coin (reverse pictured left) includes "al-Maʾmūn the Caliph . . . ordered by the Prince (*al-amīr*) al-Riḍā / the heir apparent of the Muslims, ʿAlī b. Mūsā b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib."[28] The hole pierced in the margin is fairly common, but the positioning suggests it was done with the intention of allowing the Imam's name to hang correctly, suggesting a devotional, rather than purely monetary purpose at some point in its lifespan. This is clear from the fact that, by contrast, the text on the obverse is at right angles to the pendant axis and so would not hang straight. Another dirham of Riḍā, mounted at the same point, has been recently auctioned,[29] suggesting the practice was not isolated, though we cannot tell in which period.

University of Beirut, 1981), 333–46; Deborah G. Tor, "An Historiographical Re-examination of the Appointment and Death of ʿAlī al-Riḍā," *Der Islam* 78, no. 1 (2001): 103–28; Mehmet Ali Buyukkara, "Al-Maʾmūn's Choice of ʿAlī al-Riḍā as His Heir," *Islamic Studies* 41, no. 3 (2002): 445–68.

[24] See, for example, the particular attention given to the life and sayings of Riḍā by Ibn Bābūya by devoting to him his *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*.

[25] See, for example, Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, 1:503–4. Arjomand also notes this, "Crisis," 496.

[26] Shona Wardrop, "The Lives of the Imams, Muḥammad al-Jawād and ʿAlī al-Hādī and the Development of the Shiʿite Organisation" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1988), 31–33.

[27] Hayes, "Economic Actors."

[28] Minted Samarqand, dated 202 AH. The Arabic reads, "li-Allāh / Muḥammad rasūl Allāh / al-Maʾmūn khalīfat Allāh / mimmā amara bihi al-amīr al-Riḍā / walī ʿahd al-muslimīn ʿAlī b. Mūsā b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib / Dhū al-Riyāsatayn." Source: American Numismatic Society, http://numismatics.org/collection/1994.76.4.

[29] Auctioned at Leu Numismatik, on August 15, 2020, www.acsearch.info/search.html?id=7237791

funds in opposing the ʿAbbasids, given their improved relations with the rulers.

During the new phase of accommodation with the ʿAbbasids, the Imams still continued to collect funds, which may have led to an accumulation of capital within the community which was no longer directed toward active political mobilization. We can see this pivot toward accommodation as the foundational moment in the creation of a quietist, increasingly internalized Shiʿi community in which revenues were collected, and perhaps, instead of being intended to further a mobilization against the government, were channeled back to members of the community itself. At the same time, some followers of the Imams were visible as courtiers at the ʿAbbasid court.[30] Shiʿi courtiers continued to be influential in shaping the Imami community well into the Occultation era.[31]

CHILD IMAMS, ELITE KINGMAKERS, AND ʿABBASID INTERVENTIONS IN SUCCESSION

While the idea of succession to Imamate by *waṣiyya* testament or *naṣṣ* designation placed agency in the hand of the incumbent Imam to determine his successor, in effect, it also placed a great onus on the acclamation of the new Imam by the elite of the Shiʿa. Without followers, a member of the family of the Prophet could hardly be considered as an Imam. The process of acclamation of a new Imam was no simple matter, usually involving, since the time of Ṣādiq, several competing candidates, who relied on their supporters for making the case of their Imamate to the wider community.[32]

---

[30] A systematic study of Shiʿi bureaucrats is yet to be carried out, though several works have dealt with aspects of this issue. See Arjomand, "Crisis"; Wardrop, "Lives"; Wilferd Madelung, "A Treatise on the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā on the Legality of Working for the Government (*Masʾala fī 'l-ʿamal maʿa 'l-sulṭān*)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43, no. 1 (1980): 18–31; ʿAbbās Iqbāl, *Khāndān-i nawbakhtī* (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi tahūrī, 1345/1966).

[31] Hossein Modarressi, *Taṭawwur al-mabānī al-fikriyya li-l-tashayyuʿ fī al-qurūn al-thalātha al-ūlā* (Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, n.d.), 277–300.

[32] See, for example, Van Ess's discussion of the succession of Mūsā al-Kāẓim, *Theology*, 403.

The accession of Muḥammad al-Jawād marked a turning point, for Jawād was a child when he acceded to the Imamate.[33] His accession, therefore, was, by necessity, supervised by the Shiʿi elite, and was, furthermore, under the surveillance of the ʿAbbasid caliph. An elite group of Shiʿa was instrumental in furthering the claims of the child Jawād against rivals such as his paternal uncle.[34] The existence of claims by the Imam's uncle were later considered distasteful to Imami orthodoxy, and were edited out or supplemented by canonizing statements of doctrine.[35] Imami scholars can also be seen to play a role in testing and selecting an Imam, an event that occurs in reports up till and including the occurrence of the Occultation.[36]

In her unjustly neglected dissertation, Shona Wardrop suggests that ʿAbbasid political interference is visible in reports surrounding the accession of Jawād to the Imamate, an event that is associated with the return of the caliph Maʾmūn to Baghdad, after the civil war. Having designated Jawād's father, Riḍā, as heir to the caliphate, it is unsurprising that he should take an interest in the son:

It was only some two or three years after the death of al-Riḍā and one year after al-Maʾmūn had arrived in Baghdād from where he sent for the child to come and live at court under supervision, that al-Jawād's claim to the Imāmate became openly acknowledged. As one source bluntly puts it, he remained hidden with the Imāmate until this time.[37]

Although Wardrop highlights the role of ʿAbbasid influence she does not make the explicit case that the designation of Jawād as Riḍā's heir might also have been part of a conscious policy on the part of the caliph. But it would not be far-fetched to speculate that Maʾmūn called for the boy to Baghdad as a continuation of his previous policy; now grooming an alternate candidate for Imamate to balance the appeal of the ʿAlid revolutionaries of the day. Jawād, like his father, married an ʿAbbasid princess while still a child,[38] which would seem to suggest an attempt to establish an ongoing dynastic connection. However, the cordial relations between Jawād and the ʿAbbasids does imply certain contradictions. During his Imamate, Jawād continued to command agents to collect money from his

---

[33] Arjomand, "Crisis," 497; Modarressi, *Crisis*, 62–63; Wardrop, "Lives," 26–30.

[34] "The group gathered at the meeting represented a cross section of the Shīʿite Aṣḥāb: Al-Rayyān b. al-Ṣalṭ, Ṣafwān b. Yaḥyā, Muḥammad b. Ḥakīm, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Al-Ḥajjāj, Yūnus b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān." Wardrop, "Lives," 6; see also ibid., 17.

[35] Ibid., 7–9.   [36] See Chapter 4.   [37] Wardrop, "Lives," 4.   [38] Ibid., 31–32.

followers, activity that would seem to suggest an implicit subversion of the ʿAbbasid right to rule and collect canonical Islamic revenues.[39] The institutional dynamics of a quietist Imamate were complex, contingent upon particular political circumstances, and cannot be summarized simply as being either pro- or anti-ʿAbbasid.

<div style="text-align: center;">INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE IMAMATE</div>

In spite of its challenges, the institutionalization of Imamate proceeded apace during the Imamate of Hādī. In a statement from Hādī about his inheritance from his father, we can see a clue to this process of institutionalization:

It was transmitted from Abū ʿAlī b. Rāshid, who said:

I said to Abū al-Ḥasan the third [Hādī] (AS): "[If] we are brought something and told, 'This was the property of Abū Jaʿfar [Jawād] (AS), according to us,' in that case, what should we do?"

And [Hādī] said: "What belonged to Abū Jaʿfar [Jawād] (AS) because of Imamate, then that belongs to me, and anything else is inheritance (*mīrāth*) according to the Book of God and the example (*sunna*) of his Prophet (SAAA)."[40]

Hādī articulates here a conceptual distinction between the Imam as a private person and the Imam as a representative of the Imamate. As a private person, the Imam's property is subject to the regular laws of inheritance. The property he controls as Imam, however, is not to be divided at his death. This can be seen as a response to the kind of troubles that emerged upon the death of Kāẓim, when the Wāqifī agents appropriated the revenues collected in the Imam's name.[41] This statement suggests that Imamic revenues should not be removed from the Imamate, even upon the death of the incumbent. The precise legal mechanism for passing

---

[39] In a letter preserved by Ṭūsī, Jawād ordered his followers in the Jibāl to send him the fifth of the booty (*khums*) from a battle against the "heretical" *khurramiyya*. Edmund Hayes, "Between Implementation and Legislation: The Shiʿi Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād's *Khums* Demand Letter of 220 AH/835 CE," *Islamic Law and Society* 28 No. 4 (2021); Modarressi, *Crisis*, 12; Hussain, *Occultation*, 47.

[40] Ibn Bābūya, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Qumm: Jamāʿat al-mudarrisīn fī al-ḥawza al-ʿilmiyya fī qumm al-muqaddasa, 1392/1972–73), 2:43–44.

[41] Abu ʿAmr Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Kashshī, *Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl*, ed. Mahdī al-Rijāʾī (Qumm: Muʾassasat āl al-bayt, 1404/1983–84), 2:758–61.

down Imamic property is not specified here, but it is likely that it was accomplished by a mixture of *waqf* endowments (which are mentioned as an important part of the revenues of Imamate in the early Occultation period) and *waṣiyya* bequest (which becomes significant in the contest over the property of Imamate between al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī's brother and his mother, addressed below). By the death of Ḥasan, then, there had emerged a legal conception of the Imamate, which was sufficiently depersonalized to allow for the institutional perpetuation of the Imami community into the Occultation era.

IDENTIFYING AGENTS IN THE SOURCES

It is hard to pinpoint the exact moment when agents became an influential force in the Imami community. In Kashshī's *Rijāl*, the key source for pre-Occultation agents, we see the first mention of the word *wakīl* in relation to the death of Kāẓim and the revolt of the Wāqifī agents.[42] Under Riḍā the agents continue to be mentioned, but it is really at the time of Hādī that they become prominent protagonists playing out the drama of the Imamate, with disputes raging about which figures in the community should be praised and which vilified.[43] It is with the Imamate of Hādī that the Imam's explicit identification of someone as an agent becomes the driving motivation for preserving a report. This interest in the appointment of agents suggests that occupying the office of agent had become a source of prestige over and above the mere fact of being a follower of the Imam. Kashshī mentions three cases of designation to the agentship,[44] and each of these appears to be an epistolary response to some dispute regarding authority, in two cases a confusion over who is the official agent designated by the Imam,[45] and in the third case, apparently a report tailored to meet anxieties over the role of a eunuch as agent.[46]

---

[42] Instead, they claimed that Kāẓim had not died and was the Qāʾim, implying a kind of Occultation, ibid., 2:758–61. For a study of the Wāqifa, see Buyukkara, "Schism."

[43] See, for example, the controversy over al-Faḍl b. Shādhān. Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:817–22; Tamima Bayhom-Daou, "The Imam's Knowledge and the Quran according to al-Faḍl b. Shādhān al-Nīsābūrī (d. 260 A.H./874 A.D.)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 64 (2001): 188–207.

[44] Limited by using only those reports which explicitly mention the word *wakīl*.

[45] Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 2:847, 868.   [46] Ibid., 867.

These designation reports indicate that an agent's authority ideally stemmed from the Imams: the transmitters of such reports were clearly interested in preserving a record of whoever acted as an Imam's agent so as to assess purported Imamic utterances as they were issued, and for posterity. Imams were clearly involved in appointing agents to serve as their intermediaries in various communities, and in balancing between the ambitions of rival agents in these communities.[47] However, in some cases we also see that appointment to the position of agent rested with local communities who commissioned their agents to represent them to the Imams, rather than vice versa. This is the case with the delegation of Aḥmad b. Isḥāq to examine Jaʿfar "the Liar," a case we will examine in the following chapters. In such cases, we see that a group from a local community commission a man or men to carry their money, gifts, and letters to the Imams, with terms like "delegation" (wafd) and "courier" (rasūl) being used. In some cases, it seems that an Imam struggled to prevent his followers from choosing a representative who was distasteful to him, and in these cases, we see Imams using circuitous methods to ensure support for a favored candidate.[48]

SCHOLARS VERSUS THE IMAM

Arjomand, Modarressi, Wardrop, and Takim all tend to conflate the authority of the agents with the authority of the scholars. It is true that our sources sometimes talk about a corporate group of Shiʿi elite followers with terms like "companions" (aṣḥāb), "notables" (wujūh), or some phrase approximating to "the party" (al-ʿiṣāba, al-jamāʿa, al-ṭāʾifa). Certainly, a single man sometimes played both the role of a scholar and author of books and an agent, as in the case of ʿAlī b. Mahziyār. However, the two roles were not identical, and scholars and agents interacted with the Imams in different capacities, and projected their authority as Imamic representatives in different ways. There had long been a tension between the authority of the Imam and the independent scholarly authority of Shiʿi scholars. Prominent followers of the Imams who were scholars in

---

[47] See the crisis between Fāris b. Ḥātim and his rival in Chapter 2.
[48] Perhaps the most instructive case in which the mechanisms of Imamic control are laid bare is the excommunication of the renegade agent Fāris b. Ḥātim, which we will deal with in Chapter 2. See Hayes, "The Imam Who Might Have Been"; Modarressi, *Crisis*, 72.

their own right, like Zurāra b. Aʿyan at the time of Bāqir and Ṣādiq, could even disagree with the Imams on legal and theological points.[49] The tension between scholars and Imams evolved as the Imami scholarly community crystallized. The existence of a stable and heritable Imamate which claimed to represent God's divine guidance spurred the preservation in the form of hadith of the precious Imamic judgments on law, theology, Qurʾānic exegesis, and a myriad of other topics. The preservation of Imamic rulings as hadith had the effect of narrowing the scope for the authority of living Imams, and established the scholars as touchstones for determining whether candidates for Imamate were fit for purpose, as we will see in the Qummī delegation's testing of Jaʿfar "the Liar."[50] Though the scholars clearly aimed to shore up their Imam, they also had the potential to become a centrifugal force in the community, eroding the authority of the incumbent Imam in favor of their own knowledge preserved from earlier Imams, especially the prestigious Bāqir and Ṣādiq.

CONCLUSION

The history of the emergence of the historical Imamate, and therefore the institutions surrounding it, are still obscure, and relatively untouched by scholarship, with the notable exception of Modarressi's very condensed treatment in *Crisis and Consolidation*. Nonetheless, we can trace the broad outlines of the processes of institutionalization and consolidation, as the heritable Imamate was accepted and became in entrenched in the minds, the lives, and the behaviors of an emerging Imami community. In understanding the agents within this development, it is important to separate out the different roles played by the various followers of the Imams. Hitherto, there has been a tendency to conflate these followers as a bloc of men (*rijāl*). I have argued that we must distinguish between different roles, in particular between scholars and agents, even though these roles sometimes overlapped. Unlike scholars, the prestige and authority of the agents rested upon the fiscal institutions of the Imamate: the systems for collecting the canonical alms taxes, the *zakāt* and the *khums*, which were instrumental in

---

[49] Van Ess notes several topics on which Zurāra differed from Bāqir. *Theology*, 382. See Etan Kohlberg on interpreting the tensions between Zurāra and the Imams, "Imam and Community in the Pre-Ghayba Period, " in *Authority and Political Culture in Shiʿism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 35–37.

[50] See Chapter 4 and Wardrop, "Lives," 7–9.

ritually and materially connecting the community with their Imams. Although the precise origins of an institutionalized Imamate are unclear, by the time of the tenth Imam, legal conventions and institutional protocols for defining the Imamate and its operations had emerged, setting the scene for the contestations of the Occultation era.