

## ***Emory Resources on the Middle East***

### **Shiism/Shiite Islam**

#### **What is Shiism?**

Shiism or Shiite Islam is the largest sectarian division of Islam after Sunnism or Sunni Islam. Shiites makes up roughly one tenth of the world population of Muslims. The label Shi`a originally referred to the "partisans" of `Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. It designates various groups in Islamic history united by a belief that the leader of the Muslim Community (*al-Ummah*), the *Caliph* or *Imam*, should be a member of the Prophet Muhammad's family, usually a descendant of the Prophet's daughter, Fatimah, and her husband `Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin. There are several different Shiite sects distinguished by the exact historical line of Imams each one accepts as legitimate, though they all share certain general principles and practices. The most influential sects historically and in the modern era are the Twelvers or Imamis, the Zaydis, and the Isma`ilis. Isma`ilis have divided into two main groups, called Nizaris/Khojas and Bohras.

#### **The Significance of Shiism:**

Why study Shiism? Shiite Islam has shaped Islamic history in a number of ways. The historical conflicts out of which Shiism grew in the early Islamic centuries shaped not only subsequent political but also religious and intellectual history. The transfer of the capital of the Islamic Empire from Medina to Damascus, the historical conflict between Syria and Iraq, the opposition to the Umayyad Caliphate, and the Abbasid revolution are all directly and closely related to the rise of Shiism as a political and religious ideology. Shiite theories of the Imamate (leadership of the Muslim community) have had a profound effect on Islamic theology and political theory.

Shiite Islam and its sub-divisions, the Twelvers, Isma`ilis (Nizaris and Musta`lis), and Zaydis, have been the most important sectarian groups throughout Islamic history. One may compare them and their conflicts to those of the Catholics and Protestants in European history since the reformation. Just as the religious wars shaped European politics and society for several centuries, so too have conflicts between Sunnis and Shiites shaped the politics and society of the Islamic world in many historical periods. And just as conflicts between Catholics and Protestants continue in the present era in such places as northern Ireland, so do conflicts between Sunnis and Shiites in such places as Lebanon, Iraq, and Pakistan.

In efforts to prove the correctness of their causes, both Sunnis and Shiites combed the historical record for evidence supporting their heroes of the past and condemning their enemies. Shiite historians and apologists endeavor to show Abu Bakr, `Umar, `Uthman, and others in a less than favorable light by recounting their sins and errors and harping on their obstinacy, conniving, cowardice, and stupidity. Sunni historians and apologists try to show the opposite. It is clear that on both sides, later writers have invented, exaggerated, or even suppressed evidence, producing implausible and strained interpretations of historical events. The result is that it is very difficult to disentangle the history of the first four Caliphs' reigns, the Umayyad dynasty, the Abbasid revolution, or even the Prophet's mission itself from the later ideological conflict. Nearly every work

treating these periods was written to push a particular ideological view, and we owe large bodies of material quite directly to the conflict itself.

Shiite dynasties have controlled large portions of the Islamic world, particularly in two periods, ca. 900-1100 in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran and 1500-1700 in Iran and both northern and southern India. These dynasties produced cultural flowerings quite different in configuration than those experienced under Sunni dynasties. Shiite dynasties, representing a minority of the population, tended on the whole to support a more open and ecumenical public discourse than Sunni regimes, which often tried to suppress open displays of Shiite and other sectarians' identity. They also supported specific Shiite forms of art, literature, music, and scholarship that received little patronage when Shiites lived under Sunni rule.

### **The Beginnings of Shiite Islam:**

Shiism first formed an identifiable movement in Islamic history during the First Civil War (*fitna*), which took place between 656 and 661 C.E. According to the Shiite view, `Ali was meant to assume leadership of the Community upon the Prophet's death in 632. They believe that the Prophet designated `Ali explicitly as his successor as leader of the Muslim Community. However, the jealousy and ambition of his enemies prevented him from becoming Imam or Caliph. Three other leaders, Abu Bakr (632-34), Umar (634-44), and Uthman (644-56), were chosen instead; `Ali's rightful claim to the position was ignored.

The civil war began with the assassination of `Uthman. During `Uthman's Caliphate many prominent Muslims were angered by his open appointment of his relatives, members of the aristocratic Umayyah clan, to lucrative governorships in the newly conquered provinces. In 656 a group of conspirators killed `Uthman in Medina. At this point, `Ali was chosen to succeed as Caliph. He soon met opposition from the Umayyah clan, the Prophet's widow `A'ishah, and others who accused him of complicity in `Uthman's assassination. War ensued, pitting `Ali's supporters, centered in Kufa in Iraq, against forces in Basra and Syria. In 656, `Ali battled an army led by `A'ishah, Talhah, and al-Zubayr just outside Basra. This battle is remembered as 'The Battle of the Camel' because `A'ishah joined the fray in an armored palanquin mounted on her camel `Askar. `Ali's forces killed Talhah and al-Zubayr, captured A'ishah, and returned her to Medina in humiliation. The following year, Ali lost the battle of Siffin in the Syrian desert after his deputy bungled arbitration with the agent of Mu`awiyah, the governor of Damascus. A large group of `Ali's supporters, angered that he had submitted to arbitration in the first place, left him at this point. Known as the Kharijis 'deserters', they became `Ali's most bitter enemies. `Ali retreated to Kufa in Iraq and defeated a Khariji army at Nahrawan in 658. In 661, he was assassinated by the Khariji Ibn Muljam, who stabbed him in the head in the mosque in Kufa. His supporters recognized his eldest son Hasan as their leader, but Hasan soon entered into a truce with Mu`awiyah, renouncing his claim to the caliphate. The civil war ended. The Muslim Community was reunited under one regime. Mu`awiyah became Caliph of the entire community by default, the capital was moved to Damascus. and, when Mu`awiyah designated his son Yazid as his heir, the Umayyad dynasty (661-750) was established. Doctrinally, the Muslim Community would remain divided into three main groups, `Ali's supporters (the Shiites), enemies of `Ali who had originally supported him but renounced their allegiance

at Siffin (the Kharijis), and the main body of his opponents, the Umayyads and their supporters.

### **Shiite Revolts:**

Throughout Umayyad rule, Shiites engaged in periodic uprisings against the illegitimate Caliphs, rebelling in the name of various members of *ahl al-bayt* (descendants of the Prophet). The most famous of these incidents is the revolt of Husayn, `Ali's second son, which took place just following the death of Mu`awiyah and the accession of his son Yazid in 680. Husayn was summoned to Kufa to lead the revolt. He set out from Medina with a small contingent, but Umayyad forces halted him in the Iraqi desert, preventing him from reaching his supporters in Kufa. Rather than surrender, Husayn and his followers fought; most were slaughtered, and Husayn's head was delivered to Yazid in Damascus. The martyrdom of Husayn and his followers is retold and reenacted by Shiites on `Ashura', the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. Four years later, Kufan Shiites known as al-Tawwabun 'the Penitents' led a revolt, reflecting their dedication to the cause of Husayn and their regret that they had failed to come to his aid. In 686, Mukhtar al-Thaqafi led an initially successful revolt in the name of Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, another son of `Ali, holding Kufa in 686-87. In 740, Zayd, a grandson of Husayn, led a revolt in southern Iraq and was defeated, killed, and crucified in Kufa. `Abd Allah b. Mu`awiyah, a great-grandson of Muhammad's cousin Ja`far, led yet another insurrection (744-47).

The Abbasid revolution which toppled the Umayyads in 750 began in part as a Shi'i movement, adopting the slogan *al-rida min al-bayt*, "the acceptable candidate from the family of the Prophet." Upon victory, a descendant of the Prophet's uncle `Abbas assumed rule as Caliph. In a clear pro-Shiite move, the new dynasty established their capital in Iraq, first at Wasit, then at Baghdad, founded in 762. The Abbasids, however, soon turned on their Shiite allies, imprisoning and executing many of them. Like the Umayyads, they came to be seen by Shiites as oppressive, illegitimate rulers. Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya "the Pure Soul" led a Shiite revolt against the Abbasids already in 762, and the Abbasid period would witness countless more revolts in the name of Alid leaders. There were attempts at reconciliation. The most spectacular of these was al-Ma'mun's surprise decision to appoint `Ali al-Rida, the eighth Imam of the Twelver Shiite line, as his successor in 816. He even married his daughters to the Imam and the Imam's son, to seal the alliance. Even this attempt failed, and Shiites accuse the Caliph of poisoning the Imam.

The Shiites remained a threat to the Abbasids and other Shiite regimes. They could potentially always foment a rebellion against what they saw as illegitimate rule. For this reason, the Abbasid Caliphs adopted a policy of keeping the Shiite Imams near themselves, under house arrest. The seventh through eleventh Imams of the Twelver line, Musa al-Kazim, `Ali al-Rida, Muhammad al-Taqi, `Ali al-Naqi al-Hadi, and Hasan al-`Askari, were kept close to the Abbasid Caliphs, first in Baghdad, then in Samarra, when the Caliphs moved the capital there in the mid-ninth century.

In 878 C.E. the eleventh Imam al-Hasan al-`Askari died. According to Twelver doctrine, his son, the Twelfth Imam, who was then about four years old, disappeared. Sunnis claim that this son simply died. Ja`far, a brother of al-Hasan al-`Askari claimed to be the new Imam; he is called Ja`far "the Liar" in Twelver tradition. Twelver Shi'ites

believe that the Twelfth Imam went into hiding or Occultation. During the Lesser Occultation (*al-ghaybah al-sughra*), it was possible to communicate with the Imam indirectly, through a series of agents termed *wakil* ‘agent’; *safir* “ambassador”, or *bab* ‘gate.’ In 941 C.E., however, the last of these agents died, and the Lesser occultation ended. The Greater Occultation was held to have begun. During this period, it ceased to be possible to contact the Imam in a regular manner. The Imam is not divinet, however, or a sort of holy ghost. He is flesh and blood, and circulates among the believers. Twelvers believe that his life has been miraculously prolonged, like the lives of Noah and other Biblical/Qur’anic figures-- He is now over 1,100 years old. One may meet the Twelfth Imam by chance, or see him in a dream. Some medieval texts report that he performs the pilgrimage to Mecca every year.

The practical absence of the Imam created a vacuum of religious authority. During the period of the Imams’ presence, believers with questions and problems could consult the Imam. The Imam’s statements were the unassailable truth. During the Greater Occultation, however, this was no longer possible. The role of practical religious leadership was taken up by Shiite scholars of Islamic law. Already by the eleventh century, Twelver Shiite jurists made strong claims that, during the prolonged occultation, certain roles of the Imams naturally devolved on them. They could collect alms and the *khums*, a type of religious income tax. They could decide legal cases without having been specifically designated by the Imam. Much later, this idea would be justified by the claim that the jurists as a group, an more specifically the leading jurist(s) of the age, were in effect the “general deputy” (*al-na’ib al-‘amm*) of the occulted Imam. While they had not developd this theory of the general deputyship, Twelver jurists of earlier centuries, such as al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1025), al-Sharif al-Murtada (d. 1044), and al-Shaykh al-Tusi (d. 1067), argued that duties of judging between litigants, the holding of Friday prayer, collection of *khums* funds, and so on could indeed be held in the absence of the Imam by virtue of the jurists’ authority. Al-Karajaki (d. 1057) goes so far as to term Twelver scholars “intermediaries” between the Imam and Shiite laypeople.

Twelvers believe that the Twelfth Imam is the Mahdi, a messianic figure who will reveal himself at the end of time and inaugurate a perfect reign leading up to the Day of Resurrection, “filling the world with justice just as it is now filled with injustice and oppression.”

### **Shiites in the World:**

It is a common misconception that Iran is the historic ‘homeland’ of Shiite Islam. this idea is based on the fact that Iran is today predominantly Shiite, and, arguably the most important Shiite community in the world. The truth, however, is that Medina and southern Iraq are the original centers of Shiism. From there, it spread to other areas in the Muslim world, such as Iran, Syria, and Egypt.

The predominance of Shiism in Iran is a fairly recent phenomenon. Between the eight and the fifteenth centuries, Shiites in Iran formed the majority in a number of smaller towns such as Qum, Kashan, Aveh, and Sabzevar, and a significant minority in certain major cities such as Rayy and Nishapur. Altogether, though, they probably represented no more than 20% of the Iranian population. This situation changed radically after 1501, when Shah Isma’il I conquered the city of Tabriz, founded the Safavid dynasty, and declared Twelver Shi’ism the religion of the Empire. The Safavids (1501-

1722) promoted Shi'i Islam through patronage and propaganda, and over the next several centuries, the majority of Iranians converted.

Between 950 and 1050 C.E., Twelver, Zaydi, and Isma'ili Shiites succeeded in conquering most of the Muslim world. For over a century, the Fatimids (Isma'ili) controlled, Egypt, Syria, the Hijaz, Tunisia, and for a time Sicily; the Hamdanids and other lesser Twelver dynasties controlled northern Syria and Iraq, the Buwayhids (Zaydis/Twelvers) controlled much of Iran and Iraq, Zaydi dynasties controlled areas around the Caspian and in Yemen, and the Qaramitah (Isma'ilis) controlled eastern Arabia. This unprecedented level of political power opened up tremendous opportunities for Shiites who had been, and would be, systematically discriminated against under many Sunni regimes.

Former Shiite populations have either disappeared or dwindled in a number of areas which had been ruled by Shiite dynasties but then came under the control of Sunni dynasties with strong anti-Shiite ideologies. Following the fall of the Fatimids and other Shiite dynasties of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, Shiites suffered regular persecution by the Sunni powers of the Zengids, Ayyubids, and Mamluks, and Ottomans. The Shiite populations of Tunisia, Egypt, the Hijaz Arabia, parts of Syria, such as the city of Aleppo, and parts of northern Iraq either converted or migrated to other areas.

Twelver Shiites are the overwhelming majority in Iran and a slim majority in Iraq, and Bahrain. Significant Twelver Shi'i minorities are found in Lebanon, Syria, Kuwait, Eastern Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and both northern and southern India. Zaydi Shiites, important in Iraq and northern Iran in the ninth-eleventh centuries, are now found only in Yemen and Yemeni diaspora communities. Isma'ili Shiites controlled Egypt and much of the Eastern Mediterranean between the tenth and twelfth centuries but dispersed after the fall of the Fatimid Caliphate in 1171. They established a numerous mountain strongholds in Iran and Syria and were feared as the Assassins during the Crusades. Their reign of terror ended with conquests by the Mongols and the Mamluks. Small communities remain in Syria and Iran. Most Isma'ilis ended up in India, particularly in Bombay and Gujarat, with smaller communities in Pakistan, Tajikistan, Yemen, and diaspora communities in Africa, Europe, Canada, and elsewhere.

### **Sectarian Divisions:**

The Twelver Shiites are so called because they follow a line of twelve Imams, beginning with `Ali, his two sons Hasan and Husayn, and a series of nine subsequent descendants of Hasan. It is unlikely that this theory of strict succession was always upheld in early Islamic history. There were, for example, many revolts led in the name of "Imams" who did not belong to this line, such as Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, a son of `Ali by a wife from the Banu Hanifah tribe whom he married after Fatimah passed away. In addition, there were many conflicts within Shiite communities over religious and political leadership. These produced the main Shiite sects evident today, as well as a large number of splinter groups described in works on Shiite history and theology.

### **The Twelve Imams:**

1. `Ali ibn Abi Talib, d. 661 C.E. Caliph (656-661). Assassinated by Khariji.

- Buried in Kufa (= Najaf), Iraq.
2. Hasan ibn `Ali, d. 669 C.E.. Supposedly poisoned. Buried in Medina, Saudi Arabia.
  3. Husayn ibn `Ali, d. 680. Killed in the battle of Karbala', Iraq.
  4. Zayn al-Din `Ali ibn al-Hasan, d. 712-13 C.E.. Supposedly poisoned.  
Buried in Medina, Saudi Arabia.
  5. Muhammad al-Baqir, d. 735 C.E.. Supposedly poisoned.  
Buried in Medina, Saudi Arabia.
  6. Ja`far-al-Sadiq, d. 765 C.E.. Supposedly poisoned. Buried in Medina, Saudi Arabia.
  7. Musa al-Kazim, d. 799 C.E.. Poisoned in prison. Buried in Baghdad, Iraq.
  8. `Ali al-Rida, d. 818 C.E.. Supposedly poisoned. Buried in Mashhad, Iran
  9. Muhammad Jawad al-Taqi, d. 835 C.E.. Supposedly poisoned.  
Buried in Baghdad, Iraq.
  10. `Ali al-Naqi al-Hadi, d. 868 C.E.. Supposedly poisoned. Buried in Samarra', Iraq.
  11. al-Hasan al-Askari, d. 873-74 C.E.. Died under house arrest.  
Buried in Samarra', Iraq.
  12. Muhammad al-Muntazar al-Mahdi [al-Qa'im], born 874 C.E. In occultation (incognito).

### **Sevener or Isma`ili Shiites:**

A convenient way to define the remaining Shiite sects is to describe how their line of Imams differs from that of the Twelvers. The Isma`ilis line divided from that of the Twelvers in 765, when some followers decided to recognize Ja`far al-Sadiq's first son, Isma`il, as Imam. In their view, Ja`far al-Sadiq had designated Isma`il as his heir. Isma`il died, however, before his father, and the Twelver line therefore includes Musa al-Kazim, Ja`far's second son. The Isma`ilis believed, however, that isma`il had gone into occultation, and remained the true Imam.

After a long period about which little is known, Isma`ili missionaries claiming to be acting for Isma`il's descendants became active in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and North Africa. They began in the late ninth century, and succeeded in founding the Fatimid state in Tunisia, ruled by the now-revealed Imam, in 909. These Isma`ili Imams were the Fatimid Caliphs, who conquered Egypt and 969 and ruled a major empire from then until 1171. A split occurred in 1094 C.E. in a battle over the succession between Nizar and Musta`li, two sons of the Caliph al-Mustansir. In Egypt, the supporters of Musta`li won. They continued to be the Fatimid Caliphs. After the dynasty fell, they continued on in Yemen and India, eventually becoming the Bohras. They now claim that their Imam is in occultation but can be reached through a living and available representative with the title *da`i mutlaq* "Absolute Missionary."

The Nizari supporters went underground and surfaced in Iran. The leader Hasan al-Sabbah founded a tiny new state centered in the mountain fortress of Alamut. He gathered support, and "discovered" the new rightful Imam. Over the next few decades, the Nizaris captured and built over a dozen fortresses in Iran and Syria. They became known as the Assassins for their daring murders of political enemies, such as the Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk. They played an important role in the complex political and military alignments of the Crusades, and even attempted to assassinate Saladin, twice. The descendants of the Nizari Imams lived in Iran until the nineteenth century, when, after a provincial rebellion, the current Imam was exiled and went to India, where a large

Isma`ili community had been established. Isma`ilis are still represented today by the Aga Khan (currently the 49th Imam, Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, who became Imam at the age of twenty in 1957). He is the *imam hazir* (the Present Imam). The Nizaris are the only Shiite group at present to have an Imam who is not in occultation. Isma`ili Shiites are most numerous in India today, though congregations also exist in Africa and around the world in Indian diaspora communities.

### **Fiver or Zaydi Shiites:**

The Zaydi Shiites divided from the Twelver line in the eighth century. In about 720 CE, some Shiites disagreed about the legitimacy of the fifth Imam. While the majority backed Muhammad al-Baqir, a small minority backed a certain Zayd, a grandson of Husayn. These became known as the Zaydi Shi'ites. Zayd led a rebellion against Umayyad rule in southern Iraq and was captured and executed in 740 C.E. After that, the Zaydis believe that any descenndant of the Prophet may become Imam if he rebels against illegitimate rule and establishes his own state. Zaydis were extremely active in northern Iran in the ninth and tenth centuries, but have long since died out in that region. They survived in the Yemen, where they ruled the highlands for many centuries. They controled the country until the mid-twentieth century and are still prominent there.

### **Theology:**

In theology, the Twelver and Zaydi Shiites have largely adopted Mu`tazili doctrines; this sets them apart from the Sunnis, who have generally adopted Ash`ari and Hanbali doctrines on such questions as God's justice. The Shiites hold that God is obligated to act justly, conforming to the definition of good and evil arrived at through rational inquiry. Sunni theology generally sees this as limiting God's power and presuming to dictate to God something which cannot be known with certainty and remains inscrutable to humans. Twelver Shiites identify the five following categories as the fundamental parts of theology, agreeing to a great degree with Mu`tazili theology.

#### **1. Tawhid (Divine Unity, Monotheism)**

Belief that God is the one and only deity.

#### **2. Nubuwwa (Prophethood)**

Belief in the Prophets of God, whom He sends to various peoples of the earth, including the Biblical prophets and the Prophet Muhammad. Prophets are understood to be sinless, or divinely protected from the commission of sin (*ma`sum*). According to some traditions, 124,000 prophets have been sent to mankind in different parts of the world.

#### **3. Ma`ad (The Return/The Resurrection)**

Belief in the Day of Judgment, when all human beings will be raised from the dead, judged on the basis of their good and bad deeds, and rewarded or punished accordingly.

#### **4. Imama (The Imamate)**

Belief that God entrusted the guidance of the Muslim Community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad to a series of divinely ordained descendants of the Prophet,

each designated by his predecessor. They are sinless (*ma`sum*). The Imams have knowledge from God, and their verdict is the verdict of God. Imams are the only rightful leaders and successors of the Prophet.

### 5. `Adl (Divine Justice)

Belief that God is Just. He will reward or punish any person according to his deeds. The Shiite emphasis on God's justice, which they share with Mu`tazili theology, makes them stress free will and reject the notion of predestination.

Conflict over leadership of the Community and over succession among rival Shiite claimants to the Imamate gave rise to theological doctrines and concepts that would remain important throughout Islamic history. Shiites developed the doctrines of the Imam's *`isma* 'infallibility' or 'divine protection from sin', and *nass*, the theory that the Imam must be explicitly 'designated' by his predecessor, with divine sanction. The *ghulat*, 'extremists', developed beliefs that the Imam did not die but went into occultation (*ghayba*) or that he would return (*raj`a*) as a messianic figure (*mahdi*) before the end of time. Others claimed that the Imam shared in prophetic authority, had status equal to that of the Prophet, possessed divine qualities, or manifested divinity through divine infusion (*hulul*). Some 'extreme' concepts, particularly occultation, would become standard doctrine in the main divisions of Shiism in later centuries.

A second set of issues has to do with the status of the Prophet's Companions. In order to bolster the legitimacy of `Ali, the Shiites used hadith reports and historical accounts concerning the first three Caliphs, `A'ishah, and many other Companions to impugn their characters, casting them as sinners, incompetent leaders, or evil and outright unbelievers. The Sunnis, on the other hand, adopted a compromise position, using similar accounts to uphold the view that the Companions, both those who had supported `Ali and those who were opposed to him, were all exemplary. The Shiite position, while certainly exaggerated over time, readily admits the seriousness of the conflicts that wracked the early Muslim community, while Sunni historiography regularly seeks to cover them up and explain them away.

The question of the Imamate was early subsumed under the purview of theology, and so too questions of the status of the Prophet's Companions and other prominent figures in early Islamic history. This has been historically the biggest bone of contention between the Shi'is, who deplore the actions of certain Companions, including the first three Caliphs--Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman--some of the Prophet's own wives, including A'ishah and Hafsa, other Companions, such as Talhah and al-Zubayr, and Mu`awiyah for usurping the position of leadership of the Community, which rightly belonged to Ali, or for opposing Ali, his allies, or the later Imams. The Sunni position is one of compromise; all early figures are praised, despite the conflicts which definitely occurred, and the first four Caliphs are all accepted as the best of the Companions, in descending order of excellence. For this reason, Shiites are continually accused in the medieval sources of *rafd* and *sabb*, meaning rejection of the Companions' exalted status, blasphemy against them, and vituperation or cursing of them. On the Shiite side, there developed an extensive literature on the foibles and defects of Ali's enemies among the Companions as well as of the injustices they perpetrated. Some of these undoubtedly preserve kernels of authentic material, but many may derive from later exaggeration,

including stories designed to prove the extreme cowardice and conniving of Abu Bakr and Umar as opposed to Ali's outlandish feats of bravery, or suggestions that Umar prevented the dying Prophet Muhammad from dictating his will and testament.

### **Holy Days:**

Shiites share with Sunnis the main holy days of the Islamic calendar. `Id al-Adha ("the Feast of the Sacrifice") takes place on the tenth of the twelfth month in the calendar, Dhu 'l-Hijjah, coinciding with the culmination of the annual pilgrimage rites in Mecca. They too perform the fast of Ramadan, the ninth month of the calendar, together with the ensuing `Id al-Fitr ("Breaking the Fast"). They also celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, though Sunnis tend to celebrate it on 12 Rabi` al-Awwal and Shiites five days later, on 17 Rabi` al-Awwal.

The Shiites have in addition a number of distinctly Shiite holy days. The most important is Ashura, the tenth of Muharram, the first month of the calendar, which commemorates Husayn's martyrdom. Ceremonies performed on this day and during the ten days leading up to it include emotional readings of the story of Husayn's martyrdom, processions in which the participants chant slogans, rhythmically beat their chests, flagellate their backs, and on occasion lacerate their backs or foreheads, and *ta'ziyah* passion plays including reenactments of the Battle of Karbala', often in great detail. This is followed on Safar 20 by the *arba'in*, the forty-day mourning ceremony for Husayn's death, the most important date of the year for pilgrimage (*ziyarah*) to Karbala'.

Sunnis often fast on `Ashura', but this has nothing to do with Husayn's martyrdom. It is based on the original practice of the early Muslim community to fast on the tenth day of the first month of the calendar, a practice parallel to the Jewish fast of Yom Kippur (also on the first day of the tenth month), before the fast of Ramadan was instituted. In some Sunni societies such as modern Egypt, special meals are prepared or ceremonies with celebratory elements are practiced. These, 14th-century historian al-Maqrizi claims, are practices invented by Syrian enemies of the Shiites the point of which is to anger and offend them on their holy day. (The Sunnis who do these practices are completely unaware of this origin, though.)

Another important Shiite holy day is `Id al-Ghadir, on the 18th of Dhu'l-Hijjah. This commemorates the speech the Prophet Muhammad made at Ghadir Khumm on the return trip from his Farewell Pilgrimage to Medina. In this speech, Shiites argue, the Prophet designated Ali his heir as leader of the Muslim community. In addition, the Shiite calendar includes birthday celebrations for the Imams, the most important of which are `Ali's birthday and the birthday of the Twelfth Imam. Pilgrimages to the Imams' tombs and to the tombs of their descendants are an important feature of Shiite ritual life.

### **Islamic Law and Ritual:**

Shiite and Sunni Muslims have many rituals and obligations in common, including citing the *shahadah* or Islamic Creed, performing daily prayer (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*) during Ramadan, paying alms (*zakat*), and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*).

There are, however, a number of significant differences between Sunni and Twelver Shiite law and ritual practices. Shiites often add to the *shahadah* or fundamental

Islamic creed, “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is God’s Messenger” a third clause, *wa-`Aliyyun waliyyu Llah* “and `Ali is God’s ward/ally/supporter.” They include in the call to the dawn prayer the phrase *ayya `al • khayr al-`amal* “Come to the best of works,” in place of the phrase *aβ-βal • tu khayrun min al-nawm* “Prayer is better than sleep” used in Sunni tradition.

In questions of ritual purity, the Shiites hold that one may wipe one’s inner shoes (*khuffayn* = socks or slippers) rather than washing one’s feet, when they have not been soiled since last washed. In prayer, Shiite men generally hold their hands down at their sides when in standing position, rather than clasping them in front of the chest or belly, as Sunnis do. Shiites commonly join the noon and afternoon prayers in one session, with a short break in between, and the sunset and evening prayers in one session, similarly, praying daily in three sessions rather than five. Shiites often set a *muhr* “seal,” a baked clay tablet made of earth from Karbala’, before them when praying, touching their foreheads to it when they prostrate. It is also popular to have prayer beads made out of clay from Karbala’. Shiites consider the *tar • wu*, extra prayers prayed held by Sunnis at night during the month of Ramadan as a heretical innovation.

Shiite dietary law is a bit more strict than that of the Sunnis; they do not allow the believer to eat meat slaughtered by Jews and Christians, and agree with Jewish dietary law in prohibiting shellfish (any seafood without scales) and rabbit. Shiites have some stricter requirements for the pronouncement of unilateral divorce by the husband—there must be two male witnesses for it to be valid. They also allow *mut`ah*, a type of marriage that is undertaken for a fixed duration stipulated in the contract and which Sunnis consider forbidden.

Shiite inheritance law differs quite a bit from Sunni inheritance law in that it negates the rights of the *`asabah* or agnate relatives (the deceased’s brothers, paternal uncles, and cousins) to receive any surplus left over after dividing the set shares of the inheritance, favoring the nuclear family and, significantly, daughters, instead.

The *khums* or fifth that must be paid according to Sunni law on war booty and the product of mines is generalized to a type of income tax payable to the Imam or his representative, meaning, for many centuries now, one of the top Shiite legal authorities. The *khums* funds are divided into six shares, of which three go to support the descendants of the Prophet, who cannot receive ordinary alms, and three go to support religious education and the poor and afflicted in general.

### **Scripture:**

Like Sunni Muslims, Shiite Muslims recognize two bodies of scripture, the Qur’an and hadith. The contents of each may serve as the basis for the elaboration of Islamic law.

### **The Qur’an:**

The Shiites by and large except the Qur’an in the same form that the Sunnis have it today, called the `Uthmanic recension, after the Caliph `Uthman, who reportedly appointed a committee to collect the Qur’anic text for a standard version. Historically, Shiites have often claimed that verses referring to `Ali and his right to succeed the Prophet Muhammad as leader of the community have been truncated or removed from the text by ideologically motivated enemies of the Shiites. In addition, they interpret

many of the existing verses as referring to the Imams or the family of the Prophet. Two very important verses are the following:

“So ask the People of Knowledge (*ahl al-dhikr*), if you do not know.” (Q 16:43)

“Obey God, and obey the Prophet and the Ones in Charge (*ulu al-amr*) among you.” (Q 4:59)

According to Shiite interpretation, the People of Knowledge (*ahl al-dhikr*) and the Ones in Charge (*ulu al-amr*) referred to here are the Shiite Imams. They are the ones who should be consulted about religious matters, and their directions should be obeyed. These two verses thus provide scriptural backing for the authority of the Imams.

### **Hadith/Akhbar:**

*Hadiths* or *akhbar* are orally transmitted anecdotes reporting something said or done in the early Muslim community. Sunnis restrict hadith to reports about something the Prophet Muhammad said or did. Six collections of hadith have come to be recognized as canonical by Sunni scholars:

the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari (d. 870),  
the *Sahih* of Muslim (d. 875),  
the *Sahih* of al-Tirmidhi (d. 892),  
the *Sunan* of Ibn Majah (d. 886),  
the *Sunan* of Abu Dawud (d. 888),  
and the *Sunan* of al-Nasa'i (d. 915).

The Shiites include in their hadith reports of what any of the Imams said or did. Reports about `Ali and Ja`far al-Sadiq tend to dominate. Four collections have come to be recognized as canonical:

*al-Kafi*, by al-Kulayni (d. 941),  
*Man la yahduruhu al-faqih*, by Ibn Babawayh (d. 991),  
*Tahdhib al-ahkam*, by al-Shaykh al-Tusi (d. 1067),  
and *al-Istibsar*, by al-Shaykh al-Tusi.

### **Chronology:**

632 Death of the Prophet  
656-661 Caliphate of `Ali ibn Abi Talib, Civil War  
661 `Ali assassinated by Khariji Ibn Muljam.  
661-750 Umayyad rule  
680 Battle of Karbala', martyrdom of Husayn  
684 Revolt of the Tawwabun ("Penitents")  
686 Revolt of al-Mukhtar  
740 Revolt of Zayd  
750 Abbasid revolution topples the Umayyads.

750-1258 Abbasid dynasty  
 756 Ja`far-al-Sadiq dies  
 758 Revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya  
 799 Musa al-Kazim dies in Baghdad  
 816 Caliph al-Ma`mun proclaims `Ali al-Rida heir to caliphate  
 818 `Ali al-Rida dies in Mashhad, Iran  
 835 Muhammad al-Taqi dies in Baghdad  
 868 `Ali al-Hadi dies in Samarra, Iraq  
 874 Hasan al-`Askari dies in Samarra, Iraq  
     Beginning of the Lesser Occultation  
 894 Qarmatis establish small state in eastern Arabia  
 904 Hamdanid dynasty establishes state in northern Iraq.  
 909 Fatimids establish state in Tunisia  
 941 Beginning of the Greater Occultation  
 944 Hamdanids take Aleppo  
 945 Buwayhids conquer Iraq, including Baghdad  
 969 Fatimids conquer Egypt  
 991 Ibn Babawayh dies in Rayy  
 1014 al-Sharif al-Radi, famous Shiite poet, marshall of the Shiite sayyids, and collector  
     of `Ali's sayings and speeches (*Nahj al-balaghah*) dies in Baghdad  
 1022 al-Shaykh al-Mufid, leading jurist and theologian dies in Baghdad  
 1044 al-Sharif al-Murtada, brother of al-Radi, famous jurist, official, and poet dies in  
     Baghdad  
 1055 Seljuks conquer Baghdad; al-Shaykh al-Tusi, leading Shiite scholar, flees to Najaf.  
 1067 al-Shaykh al-Tusi dies in Najaf  
 1128 `Imad al-Din Zengi, Sunni, anti-Shiite ruler, takes Aleppo.  
 1171 Ayyubids depose the Fatimids  
 1225 Abbasid Caliph al-Nasir, supporter of Shiites, dies  
 1250-1517 Mamluk dynasty in Egypt and Syria  
 1258 Mongols conquer Baghdad  
 1309 Ilkhanid ruler, Uljaytu (Muhammad Khudabanah) converts to Shiism  
 1501-1722 Safavid dynasty in Iran  
 1516-17 Ottomans conquer all of Syria and Egypt  
 1979 Iranian revolution  
 1981 Islamic Republic of Iran established

### **The Shiite Religious Calendar:**

[Bold indicates major holy day; \* indicates that it is exclusively Shiite, not celebrated by the Sunnis.]

9 Muharram	Tasu`a--eve of Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala'
<b>10 Muharram</b>	<b>`Ashura--day of Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala'*</b>
25 Muharram	Martyrdom of Zayn al-`Abidin (4)
3 Safar	Birthday of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (5)
7 Safar	Birthday of Imam Musa al-Kazim (7)

<b>20 Safar</b>	<b>al-Arba`in (fortieth-day mourning ceremony) for death of Husayn. This is the date of the main annual pilgrimage to Husayn's shrine in Karbala'.*</b>
28 Safar	Death of the Prophet Muhammad Martyrdom of Imam al-Hasan (2)
29 Safar	Martyrdom of Imam `Ali al-Rida (8)
1 Rabi` al-Awwal	Hijrah of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina
8 Rabi` al-Awwal	Martyrdom of Imam Hasan al-`Askari (11)
[12 Rabi` al-Awwal	Prophet's birthday according to Sunni tradition]
17 Rabi` al-Awwal	Birthday of Imam Ja`far al-Sadiq (6)
<b>17 Rabi` al-Awwal</b>	<b>Prophet's birthday according to Shiite tradition</b>
8 Rabi` al-Thani	Birthday of Imam Hasan al-`Askari (11)
10 Rabi` al-Thani	Death of Ma`suma, sister of Imam `Ali al-Rida (8) [her tomb is the main shrine in Qum, Iran]
5 Jumada al-Ula	Birthday of Zaynab, sister of Husayn
13 Jumada al-Ula	Martyrdom of Fatimah, according to one tradition'
3 Jumada al-Thaniya	Martyrdom of Fatimah, according to one tradition
20 Jumada al-Thaniya	Birthday of Fatimah
1 Rajab	Birthday of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (5)
3 Rajab	Martyrdom of `Ali al-Naqi (10)
10 Rajab	Birthday of Imam Muhammad al-Taqi (9)
13 Rajab	Birthday of Imam `Ali (1) Beginning of days of T tikaf
15 Rajab	Death of Zaynab, Husayn's sister
25 Rajab	Martyrdom of Imam Musa al-Kazim (7)
27 Rajab	al-Mab`ath: beginning of the Prophet's mission
3 Sha`ban	Birthday of Husayn (3)
4 Sha`ban	Birthday of Abu al-Fadl al-`Abbas, half-grother of Husayn (3)
5 Sha`ban	Birthday of `Ali Zayn al-`Abidin (4)
11 Sha`ban	Birthday of `Ali al-Akbar, a son of Husayn (3)
<b>15 Sha`ban</b>	<b>Birthday of the Twelfth Imam, al-Qa'im*</b>
<b>Ramadan</b>	<b>Month of Fasting</b>
10 Ramadan	Death of Khadijah, the Prophet's first wife, mother of Fatimah
15 Ramadan	Birthday of Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba
21 Ramadan	Martyrdom of `Ali (1)
1 Shawwal	`Id al-Fitr
25 Shawwal	Martyrdom of Ja`far al-Sadiq
11 Dhu alqa`dah	Birthday of Imam `Ali al-Rida
29 Dhu al-Qa`dah	Martyrdom of Muhammad al-Taqi
7 Dhu al-Hijjah	Martyrdom of Muhammad al-Baqir
<b>10 Dhu al-Hijjah</b>	<b>`Id al-Adha Feast of the Sacrifice</b>
15 Dhu al-Hijjah	Birthday of Ali al-Naqi al-Hadi
<b>18 Dhu al-Hijjah</b>	<b>`Id al-Ghadir*</b>
24 Dhu al-Hijjah	Day of the Mubahalalah.

**Some Shiite Dynasties:**

Fatimids 909-1171 Tunisia (Mahdiyya), Egypt (Cairo), Syria, the Hijaz, and Sicily

Qarmatis 894-c. 1100 Eastern Arabia (Bahrayn)

Buwayhids 923-1055 Iran and Iraq (Shiraz, Rayy, Isfahan, Baghdad)

Hamdanids 904-991 Northern Iraq (Mosul) ; northern Syria (Aleppo)

Mazyadids mid-tenth century-1150 Southern Iraq (Hillah).

`Uqaylids 991-1096 Northern Iraq (Mosul); Northern Syria (Aleppo);  
continued in Raqqah until later

Mirdasids 1023-1079 Northern Syria (Aleppo)

Banu fiAmmar 1070-1107 Syria (Tripoli)

Chupanids 1321-1355 Azerbaijan (Tabriz)

Jalayirids 1336-1412 Azerbaijan (Tabriz) and Iraq

Continued in southern Iraq until 1432

Sarbadarids 1337-1386 Khurasan (Eastern Iran; capital Sabzavar)

Marfiashis 1359-1501 Mazandaran (Amul)

Qara-Qoyunlu 1380-1469 Azerbaijan (Tabriz) and Iraq

Safavids 1501-1722 Iran (Tabriz, Qazvin, Isfahan)

Zand 1750-1794 Southern Iran (Shiraz)

Qajars 1794-1925 Iran (Tehran)

fiAdil Shahs 1489-1686 Southern India (Bijapur)

Nizam-Shahs 1490-1599 Southern India (Ahmadnagar)

Qutb-Shahs 1512-1687 Southern India (Golconda/Hyderabad)

Chak 1561-1586 Kashmir (Northern India, Srinagar)

Oudh 1720-1856 Northern India (Lucknow)

**Exercise I: Quiz on Shiism:**

Short answers:

1. What is `Ashura?
2. Where is the shrine of Husayn, the third Imam?
3. Name three Shiite dynasties:
4. Define Shiism in one or two sentences.
5. What are the three main divisions of Shiite Islam?

6. Name three countries in which there is a sizable Shiite population in the present day.
7. Do Shiites and Sunnis recognize the same collections of hadith? Explain.
8. Name two Shiite holy days not celebrated by Sunni Muslims.
9. What are some points of difference between Sunni and Shiite ritual practice?
10. Is the Twelfth Imam alive or dead? Is he accessible? Explain.

**Multiple choice:**

1. The eighth Imam of the Twelvers is buried
  - a. in Mashhad in Iran.
  - b. in Karbala' in Iraq.
  - c. in Baghdad in Iraq.
  - d. in Cairo in Egypt.
2. When does the biggest annual pilgrimage to Karbala' occur?
  - a. on `Ashura`.
  - b. on the first day of the year.
  - c. during Ramadan.
  - d. forty days after `Ashura`.
3. In the present day, where is the largest Zaydi community found?
  - a. Iraq.
  - b. Iran.
  - c. Yemen.
  - d. India.
4. Which dynasty is responsible for converting the bulk of the Iranian populace to Shiism?
  - a. the Ottomans.
  - b. the Safavids.
  - c. the Fatimids.
  - d. the Buwayhids.
5. When did Shiism come into being?
  - a. after World War I.
  - b. after the Mongol capture of Baghdad.
  - c. after the Abbasid revolution.
  - d. before the Abbasid revolution.

6. Which of the following dynasties were ideologically opposed to Shiism?
  - a. the Umayyads.
  - b. the Ayyubids.
  - c. the Mamluks.
  - d. all of the above.
  
7. What is the tablet of baked clay from Karbala' on which Shiites touch their foreheads in prayer called?
  - a. Imam.
  - b. mohr.
  - c. ahl al-bayt.
  - d. taqiyah.
  
8. When is the Greater Occultation?
  - a. 661 C.E.
  - b. 750-1258 C.E.
  - c. 874-941 C.E.
  - d. 941-present.
  
9. Who killed `Ali ibn Abi Talib?
  - a. Mu`awiyah, the governor of Syria and Umayyad Caliph?
  - b. Yazid, the Umayyad Caliph.
  - c. Ibn Muljam, a Khariji.
  - d. `A'ishah, wife of the Prophet Muhammad.
  
10. What does `Id al-Ghadir commemorate?
  - a. the martyrdom of `Ali.
  - b. the Prophet's designation of `Ali as his successor.
  - c. the Prophet's last pilgrimage.
  - d. the martyrdom of Husayn.

**Exercise II:**

Find a news article in a newspaper or magazine or on the internet that has something to do with Shiite Islam. Answer the following questions.

1. When did the event occur?
  
2. Where did the event occur?
  
3. What is the Shiite population of the place where it occurred?
  
4. Does the event have anything to do with conflicts between Sunni and Shiite Muslims? Explain.

5. Does the event have anything to do with distinctly Shiite practices or expressions of Shiite identity? Explain.

### **Exercise III.**

#### **Prepare and discuss the following.**

How does United States foreign policy treat Shiite Islam? What are the countries in the world where there are large Shiite communities and where this effects international politics, including relations with the United States?

Does the United States have a unified policy toward Shiites in the world?

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The First Imam, `Ali ibn Abi Talib, is famous among both Sunnis and Shiites for his outstanding character and achievements. Shiites stress in particular his strength and bravery, his devotion to the Prophet Muhammad, his wisdom, and his excellence as a judge.

#### **Sayings Attributed to `Ali ibn Abi Talib:**

Nobility is revealed in loyalty to one's brothers in times of hardship and of ease.

The ultimate generosity is that you give what you are able.

Put up with an error by your friend for the time of an attack by your enemy.

No benefit is wasted if it is received with thanks. No grace remains if it is received ungratefully.

Time is of two kinds: time you have and time you owe. When you have it, do not undervalue it. When you owe it, show forbearance.

The value of each person lies in the good he does.

People are the children of their own good deeds.

No tool is more beneficial than intelligence. No enemy is more harmful than ignorance.

[from *Kitab al-Irshad*, trans. I.K.A. Howard, pp. 220-27, with modifications.]

#### **`Ali's Description of Knowledge, to Kumayl ibn Ziyad:**

“Kumayl, hearts are containers, and the best of them are those which preserve their contents. So learn by heart what I say to you. There are three kinds of people: One who knows the Lord (for God's own sake), one who acquires knowledge as a means of salvation, and low rabble, followers of every crow, who bend with every breeze. These men do not seek to be illuminated by the light of learning, nor do they resort to an sure support.

“Kumayl, knowledge is better than wealth. Knowledge guards you, while you guard wealth. Wealth is diminished by spending, while knowledge is increased even by giving it away.

“Kumayl, the love of knowledge is a type of religion that a man professes and through which he perfects his obedience during his life and acquires a noble reputation after is death. Knowledge is a judge, but wealth is something which is judged. Kumayl, those who amass wealth die even as they live, while those who possess knowledge will continue to exist for as long as time lasts. Their individual entities will disappear, but their images will remain in men's hearts. ...

[from *Kitab al-Irshad*, trans. I.K.A. Howard, pp. 168-69, with modifications.]

#### **`Ali's Statement on Scholars:**

It is the right of a scholar that he should not be questioned too much, nor be required to answer. Nor should he be bothered when he is tired, nor caught hold of by the sleeve when he rises. One should not point to him concerning anything that is needed, nor should any secret of his be divulged. No one should breathe slander in his presence. He should be accorded great respect inasmuch as he has preserved the command of God. The student should only sit in front of him and should not overburden him with his company. If a student or anyone else comes to him while he is in a group, he should make a general greeting to them all and give particular good wishes to him.

Let [the scholar] be respected whether he is present or absent. Let his right be known. Indeed, one who possesses knowledge receives greater reward than the one who fasts, prays, or fights for the cause of God. When a scholar dies, a breach is made in Islam that can only be filled by his successor and the one who seeks after knowledge. The angels ask forgiveness for him, and those in heaven and on the earth pray for him." [from *Kitab al-Irshad*, trans. I.K.A. Howard, p. 171, with modifications.]

#### **Exercise V. Can you solve the following cases?**

`Ali ibn Abi Talib was famed for being an excellent judge.

1. The Commander of the Faithful [ `Ali]--peace be upon him--judged a case which no one had dealt with before. Two men were traveling together on a journey, and had sat down to eat together. One of them took out five pieces of bread and the other three. A man passed them and greeted them. They invited him to eat, and he sat eating with them. When he had finished eating, he put down eight dirhams, saying, "This is compensation for your food which I have eaten."

The two men began to dispute over it. The one who had three pieces of bread said, this should be split between us evenly." The one who had five pieces said, "No. I should have five dirhams, and you should have three." They came before the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, and told him their story. ...

### **How would you decide the case?**

[`Ali decided the case as follows: He said to the man who had three pieces of bread:]

"You get one of the eight dirhams and your companion gets seven.

"Praise be to God," he exclaimed. "How can that be?"

"I have told you," said `Ali. "Didn't you have three loaves?"

"Yes," he answered.

"And your companion had five?"

"Yes."

"That is twenty-four thirds [of a piece of bread]," he said. So you ate eight thirds, your companion ate eight thirds, and your guest eight. Then he gave you eight dirhams. Seven belong to your companion, and one to you."

The two men departed, reflecting on the intelligence of the judgment of their case.

### **Can you show that this is the correct answer mathematically?**

2. "Among the cases brought before [`Ali]--peace be upon him--while he was in Yemen, is one in which a pit had been dug to trap a lion. The lion had fallen into it, and the people had gathered round to look at it. One man, who was standing at the edge of the pit, had his foot slip. He grabbed and hung on to another man. That man grabbed a third, and the third grabbed a fourth. They all fell into the pit, and they were all killed by the lion. ..."

[In Islamic law, if someone is responsible for an accidental death (i.e., not a murder), his or her family must pay a large fee to the victim (one hundred camels or their equivalent in cash for an adult male.)

### **How would you solve the case? Who should pay the fees for the four men who were killed by the lion?**

[`Ali]--peace be upon him--solved the case as follows: No one was responsible for the death of the first man; he was simply a victim of the lion. Therefore, no fee should be paid for his life. He, however, was responsible for the death of the second man, so his family owed the fee for this man's life. The second man's family owed the fee for the third man's life. The third man's family owed the fee for the fourth man's life.

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### **Exercise VI.**

Read the passage below and answer the following questions. This is the story of a battle which occurred during the Prophet's lifetime at a place called Dhat al-Silsilah.

### **[The Campaign of Dhat al-Silsilah]**

... A Bedouin came to the Prophet, squatted in front of him, and said, 'I have come to give you advice. A group of Bedouins have gathered together at Wadi al-Raml and have plotted to come and attack you at Medina during the night.' Then he described [the Bedouins] to him.

The Prophet ordered the call to be given. "The prayer service should be attended by all." The Muslims gathered, and he mounted the pulpit. He praised and glorified God, then said, "There is an enemy of God and an enemy of yours who has plotted to attack you tonight. Who will go forth against them?"

A group of the poor stood up and responded, "We will go against them, Messenger of God. Appoint over us whoever you wish." He drew lots among them, and the lot fell upon eighty among them and others. He summoned Abu Bakr and told him, "Take the flag and go out against the Banu Sulaym tribe. They are near al-Harra."

He went out, and with him went the people, until he drew near their territory. There were many stones and trees there, and the [Bedouin contingent] was in the middle of the valley. Descent into it was difficult. When Abu Bakr reached the edge of the valley, he tried to go down, but the Bedouins charged out against him and put him to flight. They killed a great number of Muslims, and Abu Bakr fled from the enemy.

When they returned to the Prophet, he appointed `Umar ibn al-Khattab the commander and sent him against the Bedouins. They lay hidden under the stones and trees. When he tried to go down into the valley, they came out against him and put him to flight.

The Prophet was grieved at this. `Amr ibn al-`As said to him, "Send me against them, Messenger of God. For warfare is deception; I might be able to deceive them."

He sent him with a group of men and appointed him commander. When he got to the valley, they charged out against him and put him to flight. They killed a number of his companions.

The Messenger of God then delayed for several days, praying [for help] against them. Then he summoned the Commander of the Faithful [`Ali]. He appointed him commander, and said, "I hereby send him as one who will attack, not one who will flee." Then he raised his hands to the heavens and pleaded, "O God, if You know that I am Your Messenger, then protect him for me. Act through him, act." Thus he prayed for the will of God for [`Ali].

`Ali ibn Abi Talib set out, and the Messenger of God went out to see him off. ... Among the [fighters] whom he had sent along with [`Ali] were Abu Bakr, `Umar, and `Amr ibn al-`As. [`Ali] set off toward Iraq, deviating from the road so that they would think that he was heading with [his men] in a different direction. Then he took them along a little-known track and brought them along so that he approached the valley from its entrance. When he neared the valley, he ordered those with him to tie up their horses and made them stop in their place. He ordered them: "Do not leave your position." Then he went out ahead of them and stood at a distance.

When `Amr ibn al-`As saw what he had done, he had no doubt that victory would be his. He said to Abu Bakr, "I know this place better than `Ali. There is something here that will attack us more fiercely than the Banu Sulaym: hyenas and wolves. If they come out against us, I fear that they will cut us down. Speak to him to let us go up the valley." Abu Bakr went forward and spoke to him. He spoke at length, but the Commander of the Faithful did not answer a single word. [Abu Bakr] returned to them and said, "No, by

God, he did not say a single word in reply.” Then `Amr ibn al-`As said to `Umar ibn al-Khattab, “You will be more forceful [in convincing] him.” So `Umar wne and spoke to him. [ `Ali] treated him exactly as he had treated Abu Bakr. [ `Umar] returned to them and told them that he had not answered him.

`Amr ibn al-`As announced [to the group], “It is not fitting that we should lose our lives. So come with us up the valley.” “No, by God,” retorted the Muslims, “we will not do so. The Messenger of God ordered us to listen to `Ali and to obey him. Shall we abandon his command and listen to you and obey you instead?”

They continued advancing in this manner until the Commander of the Faithful gain victory. He was able to surround the enemy while they were still off guard. God, the Exalted, had given him power over them. ...

The Prophet announced the news of the victory to his Companions and ordered them to meet the Commander of the Faithful. They went out to meet him with the Prophet at their head. The Muslims positioned themselves in two ranks. When `Ali saw the Prophet, he dismounted from his horse. The Prophet told him, “Mount. God and His Messenger are pleased with you”

The Commander of the Faithful wept with joy. Then the Prophet said, “`Ali, if it was not for the fact that I am concerned that some factions of my Community would say of you what the Christians say of Jesus Christ, son of Mary, I would say such things of you today, that you could never pass a gathering of men without them taking the soil from under your feet.”

[from *Kitab al-Irshad*, trans. I.K.A. Howard, pp. 113-15, with corrections and modifications.]

### Question:

1. What is this story intended to tell us about the characters of Abu Bakr, `Umar, and `Ali? How does it accomplish this? What specific features and rhetorical strategies of the story stand out?

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### Exercise VII. An Account of Meeting the Twelfth Imam

Read the passage below and answer the following questions.

Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Ishaq al-Taliqani, may God be pleased with him, reported to us and said, Abu 'l-Qasim `Ali ibn Ahmad al-Khadiji al-Kufi, known as Abu 'l-Qasim al-Khadiji, said: al-Azdi reported to us [the following experience]:

While I was circumambulating [the Ka`bah during the pilgirmage to Mecca], I had completed six circuits and was about to make the seventh, when all of a sudden I was faced with a study circle (*halqah*) to the right of the Ka`bah. A young man with a sweet odor and a reverend appearance was sitting close among the people and addressing them. I have never heard any speech more beautiful than his, nor any pronunciation sweeter than his, nor seen anything as excellent as his manner of sitting. I went to accost him, but the people scolded me, so I asked one of them, "Who is this?" He said, "This is the descendant of the

Prophet, who appears one day every year to his devotees and lectures to them." Then I said, "Oh my master, I have come in search of guidance, so grant me advice, may God guide you." He handed me a pebble, and I turned my face away. One of the people sitting with him asked me, "What did he give to you?" I said, "a pebble," and I disclosed it, but lo and behold, it was a gold ingot!

He departed, but then he was before me, for he had followed me. He said to me, "May you accept God's proof, may blindness forsake you, and may the truth become apparent to you. Do you recognize me?" I said, "No." He, peace be upon him, said, "I am the One Who Will Rise Up in this Age. I am the one who will fill the earth with Justice, just as it is now filled with injustice. The earth is never without a Proof, and the people will never be left without guidance. This is a keepsake which you should only disclose to your brothers among the people of the Truth."

[al-Shaykh al-ḥūṣī, *Kitāb al-ghaybah*, 152-53.]

### **Questions:**

1. Where was the narrator when he met the Twelfth Imam? What was he doing?
2. What do we learn about the Twelfth Imam's movements during the year?
3. Did the narrator recognize the Twelfth Imam immediately? Describe the stages or process of recognition.
4. What function does the pebble serve?
5. What is the message that the Imam gave to the narrator? What does "your brothers among the people of the Truth" mean?

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D. J. Stewart  
Emory University