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The Origins of Twelver Shi'ism in Iran

İran'da On iki İmam Şiiliğinin Kökenleri

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Abstract

The issue of the entry of Imāmite/Twelver Shī'ism into Iran is one of the most controversial issues in the History of Islamic Sects. According to the established general opinion, it is after the Safavids that the Shī'ite groups in question became the dominant thought in Iran. Before, they were only a minority. However, this study reveals that Imāmite Shī'ism was not a minority to be underestimated even before the Safavids.

The introduction of Imāmism/Twelve Shī'ism into Iran runs parallel to the formation of the Shī'ite Imāmite ḥadīth literature that was produced in Qum in the second phase of its configuration. The first phase was inaugurated by the introduction of some extremist doctrines in Kufa of Iraq and then discussion of them by such theologians as Hishām bin al-Ḥakam and 'Alī bin Mitham al-Tammār in such centers as Kufa and Baghdad. The Arabs of Yemenite origin who immigrated from Kufa to Qum carried the lore formed in the former to the latter. This Qum-centered Shī'ism in Iran made progress in some areas that were in contact with Kufa and Baghdad.

To speak in very general terms, Qum's becoming the center of Imāmite Shī'ism in Iran starts in the late third/ninth century. In this period, the followers of Imāmite Shī'ism seemed to exist in the region of Nishabur (Sabzevar and Tus), as well as in Ahwaz and the coasts of Fars. Towards the end of the fourth century, Imāmism made some progress in Tabaristan, Daylam, Jurjan, Hamadan, Ray, Azerbaijan, and, though to a lesser degree, in some parts of Transoxiana. By the end of the fifth/eleventh century, such towns as Kashan and Abeh (Aveh) near Qum had become followers of Imāmism, their population having possibly increased in Ray. By the sixth/twelfth century, they had grown even more to acquire the majority in Ray, gaining a considerable number of followers in Qazvin, Mazandaran, and Tabaristan (Sari and Uram) in the north and in Astarabad and Jurjan in the northeast. In the seventh/thirteenth century, when the Ilkhanates came into power, the Imāmite Shī'ites began to appear in Isfahan, too, maintaining their control of Ray in which, being one of the largest cities of the time, they reached majority one century earlier; in further east, they reached Herat and Balkh, which are located in the territory of present-day Afghanistan. In fact, Imāmite Shī'ism held ground in the first place in Qum and the neighboring area, as well as the region of Nishabur, never shrinking after it held ground over there. In answer to the question of whether Shī'ism retreated in any regions, Azerbaijan and Hamadan are possible to be mentioned; however, they are not clearly so. Although the names Azerbaijan and Hamadan may be given in response to the question "whether there were regions that could be considered as a regression in some periods in this process?", it is not entirely clear to what extent this answer reflects the truth.

Keywords: Shī'ism, Imāmism, Iran, Qum.

Öz

İmâmiyye Şiîliğinin İran'a girişi meselesi, İslam Mezhepleri Tarihi'nin en tartışmalı hususlarından biridir. Oluşmuş genel kanaate göre, söz konusu Şiî grupların İran'da baskın düşünce haline gelmesi Safevilerden sonradır. Daha öncesinde ise sadece bir azınlık durumundaydılar. Fakat yaptığımız bu çalışmada, İmamiyye Şiîliğinin Safeviler öncesinde de küçümsenecek bir azınlık durumunda olmadığını ortaya çıkartmaktadır.

İmâmiyye/İsnâaşeriyye Şiîliğinin İran'a girişi, onun oluşum sürecinin ikinci evresinde Kum'da üretilen Şii İmami hadis literatürünün oluşumu ile paralellik arz eder. İlk evre,

Irak'ta Kufe'de ortaya atılan bazı gulat fikirler ile onların bir kısmının Kufe ve Bağdad gibi merkezlerde Hişam b. el-Hakem ve Ali b. Misem et-Temmar gibi kelimcılar tarafından tartışılmasıyla başlamasıdır. Kufe'den Kum'a göç etmiş olan Yemen kökenli Araplar, buralarda oluşan birikimi Kum'a taşımışlardır. İran'da Kum merkezli bu Şiilik, Kufe ve Bağdad'la temas halindeki bazı bölgelerde gelişme göstermiştir.

Çok genel olarak ifade etmeye çalışırsak, Kum'un İran'daki İmâmiyye Şiiliğinin merkezi olması 3/9. yüzyılın sonlarında başlar. Bu dönemde Nişabur bölgesi (Sebzevar ve Tus) ile Ahvaz ve Fars sahillerinde de İmâmî Şiiliğin müntesipleri olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Yaklaşık bir yüz yıl sonrasına doğru gelindiğinde Taberistan, Deylem, Cürcan, Hemedan, Rey ve Azerbaycan, hatta çok cüz'i de olsa Mavereünnehir'in bazı bölgelerine de birtakım sıçramalar yaptığı gözükmemektedir. 5/11. yüzyılda ise Kum'a yakın Kaşan ve Abeh (Aveh) gibi yerleşim birimlerinin de İmâmiyye'ye bağlı hale geldiği, Rey'de de nüfuslarının sayı olarak artmış olabileceği anlaşılmaktadır. 6/12. yüzyılda daha da yayılarak Rey'de çoğunluğu elde ettikleri, kuzeye doğru Kazvin, Mazenderan ve Taberistan'da Sari ve Urem vb. bazı yerleşim birimleri ile kuzeydoğuya doğru da Esterebad ve bağlı bulunduğu Cürcan'da önemli derecede taraftar kitlesine ulaştıkları görülmektedir. 7/13. yüzyılda İlhanlıların hâkim olduğu dönemde İmâmiyye Şiîlerinin İsfahan'da da var olmaya başladıkları, zamanının en büyük şehirlerinden olan ve bir asır öncesinde çoğunluğa ulaştıkları Rey'de üstünlüklerini devam ettirdikleri, Nişabur'dan daha doğuya doğru da Herat ve Belh gibi günümüz Afganistan topraklarına kadar vardıkları kanaatine varılmıştır. Zaten ilk etapta Kum ve çevresindeki yerleşim yerleri ile Nişabur bölgesinde tutunan İmâmiyye Şîası, oralarda yer bulmalarının ardından hiç irtifa kaybetmemiştir. "Bu süreç içerisinde bazı dönemlerde bir geriye gidiş olarak değerlendirilebilecek bölgeler olmuş mu?" sorusuna karşılık cevap olarak, Azerbaycan ve Hemedan isimleri verilebilir; ancak o da tam olarak net değildir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şîa, İmâmiyye, İran, Kum.

Introduction

Iran is a large country, with a population of 83 million people and an area of 1.650.000 kilometers square. With its territory stretching westwards from Afghanistan to Iraq, and southwards from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf and the Oman Gulf, it bridges the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Persians are the majority ethnic group, to be followed by Azeris, Kurds, Turkmens, Lurs, Baluchis, and Arabs. Iran is historically a multi-religious country, and the overwhelming majority are Muslims, 90 percent of them being Shī'ites.

First of all, any study that will cover the historical trajectory of Shī'ism in Iran needs to consider a vast territory and various ethnic groups. It is generally accepted that the rise of Shī'ism in Iran as the dominant Islāmic sect coincides with the rise of the Safavids in 1501. The territory of the country, though it shrank a little from its eastern and western borders, has remained mostly the same throughout the last five centuries. Therefore, our primary goal in this study will be to outline the gestation of

Shī'ism in Iran during the pre-Safavid period with a special emphasis on its geographical and demographical centers.

The areas that we shall focus on in our investigation of the history of Shī'ism in Iran will be certain significant historical cities and their vicinities in which the remnants of Shī'ism are traceable. Since the central part of the country, being historically viewed as part of Khurasan and the heartland of Iran is largely covered in deserts, a corridor of important settlements is aligned along the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, taking an almost ninety-degree turn eastwards. Those cities which lie in the east-west direction at the same time form the course of the historical Silk Road. Of them, one can mention Qum, Ray, Jurjan, Nishabur, and Tus, from the east to the west.

The Iranian territory as we have described very sketchily when it is looked to as the early hotbed of Shī'ism, hosts such important cities as Kashan, Qum, Ave, Save and Ray stretching from the south to the north, and a four-hundred-kilometer line that runs through Qazvin, Tabaristan, and Daylam, as well as Hamadan lying some 250 kilometers east of Qum. One should also mention an enclave of some 1.200 kilometers square, stretching from Ray eastwards to Jurjan, Nishabur, Tus, and Marv. In fact, south of this line is bordered by the desert; the city of Ahvaz, located in Khuzistan southwest to the Iraqi border, as well as the coasts of the Persian Gulf, were also populated by Shī'ites. However, the present-day Iranian province of Fars, stretching from Isfahan southwards and covering Shiraz, and some eastern Khurasanid cities, as well as many others lying in the south such as Kirman and Sistan, are not of much importance for Shī'ism. In other words, those regions in Iran where Shī'ism spread in the early centuries, as we shall see, were not those which were heavily populated by Persians; on the contrary, they were the fertile western and northern soils, into which a huge number of Arab tribes immigrated.

The cities which we have already named cover in fact an important portion of Iran in territorial and demographical terms. One cannot, however, say that the majority of the population of the region were Shī'ites, for admitting the presence of Shī'ism over there does not mean that the region was totally or overwhelmingly Shī'ite. In fact, we excluded the Zaydite from our target Shī'ite population though they are considered Shī'ites alike. Rather, the Shī'ite movement that we shall focus on will be exclusively Imāmites or the Twelvers, who had probably been a minority for a long time in cities other than Qum. Yet, over time they increased in number in a big city like Ray, close to Qum. Relying on the information given by Muqaddasī, a famous Muslim geographer of the fourth/tenth century, one can ascertain this fact, though partially.

Imāmism or Twelver Shī'ism is the most widespread branch of Shī'ism and its adherents having been called "Imāmite" until the end of the third/ninth century. They have been named "Rāfiḍīs" pejoratively by their adversaries. This sect evolved first into Imāmism and then into Twelver Shī'ism with a claim for the presence and

concealment of the Twelfth Imām¹. The formation of this Shī'ite group goes as late as the third/ninth century. Therefore, I tend to consider such groups as Imāmītes, Ismā'īlites, and Zaydites to be interpenetrated Shī'ite movements in the early period when the Shī'ite doctrines of each group were yet to be crystallized.

Some authors generally attribute the origin of Shī'ism to Iranian/Persian elements or Persian-Arab struggle, since Imāmism/Twelver Shī'ism is now integrated with Iran.² This is of course undeniable and thus such pre-Islamic religions in Iran as Mazdaism/Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism had, more or less, an influence on Shī'ism. Yet, it is untenable to explain the problem by reducing it to this factor. One should also accept that Shī'ism, just like other Islāmī sects, came under the influence of Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism which were the dominant religions in the region today called the Middle East. In other words, Shī'ism, in general terms, should be thought of as part of the Islāmī tradition that is built upon the shared Semitic-Persian culture including the Yemenites³. The notion of a charismatic leader or the leader-cult has always been present in the middle east with differing degrees, as one can see in the case of the Shī'ite Imāms, this notion having been represented by various groups in every religion.

The generic category of Shī'ism, including Imāmism/Twelver Shī'ism, did not rise out of blue, just as Ahl al-Sunna and other sects did not. It came down to the present age by undergoing major developments and transformations, maintaining its vitality even more strongly. The special charisma as especially attributed to 'Alī and his children from Fāṭima remains central to any discussion of Shī'ism. In other terms, there must be some certain groups who claim the universal Muslim leadership for 'Alī and his sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and in turn their sons. However, in any talk about Imāmism/Twelver Shī'ism as the official State sect of contemporary Iran, the approving of the doctrine that the Twelve Imāms, coming from the lineage of 'Alī and his son Ḥusayn, were divinely appointed as caliph with naṣṣ (divine revelation) is essential. Such formation took place only as late as the end of the third/ninth century. However, the special charisma as attributed to such figures coming from 'Alī's offspring as Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya and his son Abū Hāshim, though not

¹ For further information, see, Cemil Hakyemez, *Şîa'da Gaybet İnancı ve Gaib On İkinci İmam el-Mehdî*, (Ankara: İsam Yayınları, 2017).

² The famous Zāhirite scholar Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) says as the following: "When the Persians came to realize that they could not defeat Islam by sword and weapon, they practiced the seditious method of Ibn Saba. Some of them declared to have converted into Islam at one, approaching the Shī'ites in the guise of the love for Ahl al-Bayt. By exploiting and manipulating the injustice done to 'Alī, they brought Shī'ism under their own control and then de-Islamized it." See Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Aḥwāl wa al-Niḥāl*, critical ed. M. Ibrāhīm Naṣr-'Abdurrahmān 'Umayra, (Beirut: 1416/1996, 2/273).

³ The Persians living in southern Iraq had similar beliefs with the Yemenites in passing down the political leadership through inheritance as a kingdom credited with semi-divine qualities. Therefore, the Yemenites promptly replied to the call by the Shī'ites who acted with the motto of toppling the "infidel" Umayyads and restoring caliphate to the Ahl al-Bayt. Farhad Daftary, *İsmaililer; Tarih ve Kuram*, Turkish trans. Ercüment Özkaya, (Ankara: Rastlantı Yayınları, 2001), 85.

exclusive to Ḥasan's and Ḥusayn's offspring, emerged only as late as the end of the first century. Though gaining no popularity in that period, some small groups in Kufa claimed for them *waṣiyya* (inheritance), *rağ'a* (return), and *mahdawīyya* (Messianism)⁴. This charisma in time-lapsed into the lineage of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, picking up much more popularity. Zaydism maintained the belief in the charisma of 'Alī's lineage through the Ḥasanid and Ḥusaynid lines. Imāmites and Ismā'īlites not only confined the charisma to Ḥusayn's offspring but also added to it such doctrines as *naṣṣ*, *ta'yīn*, *ma'ṣūmiyya*, *ghayba*, etc.

1. The Historical Background of Shī'ism in Iran

The present-day Iranian territory is one of the earliest Islāmic conquests. The Muslim conquerors reached the borders of Transoxiana as early as the caliphate of 'Uthmān. In this vast region ruled by the Sāsānids, the Zoroastrians as the most widespread religious group were gradually converted to Islam once their lands were conquered by the Muslims. Of them, especially those coming from the urban and affluent families/nobilities, to preserve their privileged position, preferred the central Sunnite conception of religion as favored by the ruling elite, and not Shī'ism as the representative of dissension and opposition. The fact that such 'Abbāsīd vassals as Ṭāhirids and Sāmānids broke away from the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate and declared their autonomy contributed to the rising power of Sunnism in the region. Therefore, such important cities as Isfahan and Ray as well as Nishabur, Merv, and Balkh in further east were initially dominated by the Sunnite population. However, one could encounter the Shī'ite population more densely in the vicinity of Nishabur, as well as in highlands.

There are not only religious and cultural but also political dimensions to the emergence of religious sects. In fact, Shī'ism emerged as a result of numerous factors such as the Islāmic revelation, the beliefs and cultures existing in the region, political incidents, and speedy demographic movements, all coming together to produce a new interpretation of Islam. Within this context, any discussion of the political catalyzers of Shī'ism should focus not so much on Iran as on Yemen, especially on those Yemenite tribes who were settled in Kufa during the caliphate of 'Umar⁵. Furthermore, these tribes played an important role in carrying political Shī'ism into the heartland of Iran. This observation is supported by the fact that the earliest Messianic claims emerged

⁴ Kufa was the center of antinomianism and extremist Shī'ism. Almost all of those who had a mixed geneolgy and were blamed for antinomianism in the second/eighth century lived in this city. The ancient city of Hira, just next to it, hosted Jews, Christian, Daysānites and Manicheans. Melhem Chokr, *İslām'ın Hicrî İkinci Asrında Zındıklık ve Zındıklar*, Turkish trans. Ayşe Meral, (İstanbul: Anka Yayınları 2002), 295, 341.

⁵ In contrast to what is commonly thought, the first followers of Shī'ism are Arabs, and not Persians. Especially the south Arabia had centuries-old tradition of "living felicitously under the rule of divine kings", which reappeared as the belief of imāmate when they became Muslim. Montgomery Watt, *İslam'da Siyasal Düşüncenin Oluşumu*, Turkish trans. Ulvi Murat Kılavuz, (İstanbul: Birey Yayınları, 2001), 75-76. The historian Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897) reports that all of the Yemenites in Marv tended to Shī'ism. Ya'qūbī, Aḥmad bin Abī Ya'qūb bin Ja'far bin Wahab, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, (Beirut: Dārū Ṣadr, 1992/1412), 2/399, 408.

amongst the Yemenite Qaḥṭānids in Kufa⁶; in addition, the Yemenite ʿIjla tribesmen such as Muḡhīra bin Saʿīd and Abū Manṣūr al-ʿIjlī set forth gnostic/extreme Shīʿite views⁷. In other words, looking from a general perspective, to have a general vision of the historical trajectory of Shīʿism, one should consider some factors ranging from the early Islāmīc conquests to the speedy demographic movements, the intertribal strives between the northern and southern Arabs, as well as the pre-Islāmīc cultures and beliefs. On this matter, the primary attention should be attached to Kufa, which, along with Basra, is one of the two leading scientific and political centers of the first century of Islām apart from Madina. The first seeds of most of the sects were also sown in these lands. These cities were first built by Caliph ʿUmar. Their first settlers were mostly Yemenite tribesmen⁸. It was later on converted into the seat of the State. As Muʿāwīya emerged victorious from his battle with ʿAlī, Kufa became the hotbed of the political dissension. Those who, like Mukhtār bin al-Thaqafī, surged against the Umayyads, defended the rights of the Hāshimids on the one hand, and received the biggest support from these Yemenite tribes on the other. The Muslim heresiographers referred to these groups as “Kaysāniyya”. They viewed Muḡammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya (d. 81/700) as their leader among the Hāshimids after the murder of Ḥusayn, introducing his son after his death⁹. The fact that the Umayyads were able to clamp down these revolts that were carried out in the name of the Hāshimids, reinforcing their authority in this region over time, caused the groups in question to move northeast into the Iranian cities, and they deepened their relationship with the anti-Umayyad mawālīs (non-Arab Muslims) over time. For many mawālīs of Khurasan adopted Abū Hāshim, grandson of ʿAlī, as their leader. Soon later, these movements generated the northern Iran-centered ʿAbbāsīd revolution.

These revolts, also regarded as Shīʿite political movements, lasted until the year 150/740 as centering in Kufa¹⁰. Yet the revolt led by Zayd bin ʿAlī in the year 122/740 was not only an important sign of the rise of the anti-Umayyad block but also showed that the partisanship for the sons of ʿAlī made an appearance in such Iranian cities as

⁶ For this understanding, see Gerlof Van Vloten, *Emevi Devrinde Arap Hâkimiyeti, Şia ve Mesih Akideleri Üzerine Araştırmalar*, Turkish trans. M. Said Hatipoğlu, (Ankara, 1986).

⁷ For more information, see Ali Avcu, *İslam'ın İlk Marjinalleri Gulat-ı Şia*, (Ankara: Fecr Yayınları, 2020), 138 etc.

⁸ Baladhūrī, Aḡmad bin Yaḡyā bin Jarīr, *Futūḡ al-Buldān: Ūlkelerin Fetihleri*, Turkish trans. Mustafa Fayda, (Ankara 2002), 396.

⁹ A group from Kaysāniyya claims that Muḡammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya did not die; on the contrary, he was alive and would return as the awaited Maḡdī. ʿAbd al-Qāḡir al-Baḡhdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Fīraq*, Turkish translation by E. Rūfī Fıḡlalı, p. 19. The classical sources of Islamic heresiography report that the doctrines of the sects titled “Mukhtāriyya” and “Kaysāniyya” became publicized only after the year 67/686 when Mukhtār was killed. Hasan Onat, *Emeviler Dönemi Şii Hareketleri ve Günümüz Şiiliḡi*, (Ankara, 1993), 114.

¹⁰ Jan-Olaf Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism, Politics and Religion in the Formative Period of Islam*, (Leiden, 1985), 71.

Ray and Jurjan¹¹. Ḥusayn's grandson Zayd bin 'Alī and son Yaḥyā were killed in this revolt after a while. In fact, soon after, the 'Abbāsīd revolution took place.

The 'Abbāsīd revolution set the stage anew. When the Umayyads dwindled, the Hāshimids were divided that time amongst themselves. When, from the Hāshimids, the 'Abbāsīds seized the power, their cousins, the sons of 'Alī not only set to fighting again but also acted as the base of opposition in the power-struggles that would rage for centuries. The leading actor of the 'Abbāsīd revolution and the hero of the Khurasanids was Abū Muslim al-Khurasānī. Yet, the 'Abbāsīds saw the future of their power in doing away with him and thus executed him in 137/755. This political murder profoundly upset the people of the region, pushing them away from the 'Abbāsīds and bringing them closer to the partisanship of the sons of 'Alī. This led to a convergence between the anti-Umayyad Arab settlers and the natives on a common ideology of political opposition. That is the rise of such extremist sects as Mubayyiḍa, Mukhammira, and Khurramī, which gathered Persians and Arabs together around a common cause. Soon later, the revolts of the sons of 'Alī were to erupt.

The sons of 'Alī made their first revolt against the 'Abbāsīds in 145/762 in Madina under the leadership of Muḥammad bin 'Abdillāh al-Nafs al-Zakiyya. This revolt, continued by his brother after his death, was supported by Khurasanids¹². In fact, the center of the revolts soon shifted to Khurasan. As the year 219/834 set in, we see in the region Muḥammad bin al-Qāsim as a son of 'Alī appearing on stage. In response to an invitation by a group of pilgrims from Khurasan, he went to Juzjan to start a revolt, rallying some forty-thousand people around himself, proceeding from there to Merv and then Talaqan¹³.

While these political actions, generally referred to as the Zaydite revolts, violently take place in Khurasan, the Shī'ite underground activities showed a tendency to spread. In this context, the Qarmaṭian/Ismā'īlite propagations and missions deserve special attention. It is believed that the first Ismā'īlite mission in Khurasan was inaugurated in the vicinity of Ray in the late third/ninth century. Thanks to the zealous efforts by their famous missionary Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934), they gained a considerable number of followers in Jurjan, Tabaristan, and Azerbaijan¹⁴.

As for Imāmite Shī'ites as the earliest representatives of the Iranian Shī'ism, a certain section of them wholeheartedly supported the revolutionary movements in question, their relatives also taking part in them. Yet, it seems that they stayed away

¹¹ Abū al-Faraj Iṣfahānī (d. 356/966) reports that nearly fifteen-thousand people from Khurasan and Iraq participated in this revolt Abū al-Faraj 'Alī bin al-Ḥusayn Iṣfahānī, *Makātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, critical ed. Sayyid Aḥmad Saqar, (Beyrut n.d.), 98.

¹² See Mehmet Azimli, "Muhammed en-Nefsu'z-Zekiyye ve Kardeşi İbrahim'in İsyanı", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi*, 8/3 (2008), 55-74.

¹³ Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, 2/ 471-472. For a detailed information about these revolts, see Habip Demir, *Horasan'da Şiilik: İran'da Şiiliğin Tarihsel Kökleri*, (Ankara: OTTO, 2017), 67-75.

¹⁴ For a detailed information information on the spread of Ismā'īlism into the region, see Muzaffer Tan, *İsmailî Davet Yapılanması*, (Ankara: Yayınevi, 2015), 146-155; Ali Avcu, *Horasan-Maveraünnehir'de İsmaililik*, (İstanbul: Marmara Akademi Yayınları, 2018), 113-148.

to participate in the Zaydite revolts and stayed aloof from the Ismā'īlite underground revolutionary activities. Many followers of Kaysāniyya, after they had waited for the return of Muḥammad bin al-Ḥanafīyya as Mahdī for a long time, came to view Ja'far al-Şādiq (d. 148/765) as their imām¹⁵. Thanks to the theory of Imāmite they devised in the mid-second/eighth century, they incorporated their leader 'Alī's offspring through Fāṭima. In the late third/ninth century, they claimed that their imām went into hiding in the year 260/873, fixing the number of their imāms as twelve with him.

As one may see clearly from the ongoing discussion, when the third/ninth century turned, the pendulum swung in favor of the offspring of 'Alī in the lands of Iran. This is the reason why the 'Abbāsīd caliph Ma'mūn declared 'Alī al-Riḍā in 201/817 as his successor. However, we have no exact information on the direction and extent of the partisanship of 'Alī's offspring in this region. It seems that this situation was mostly political, acting as an indicator of the popular opposition against the 'Abbāsīd rule. It seems that the residents of the region tend to support voluntarily any actions done in the name of the sons of 'Alī. Such movements, characterized as Zaydite in general, enjoyed serious support from the regions of Tabaristan and Daylam, resulting in the rise of a Zaydite polity in Tabaristan. The lasting revolts spread into the region of Ray and Jurjan and they even seized control of Jurjan¹⁶. Afterwards, we see the spread of the Qarmaṭian/Ismā'īlite movements, rallying a considerable number of followers. On the other hand, the Imāmite Shī'ites stayed aloof from the political movements, their activities concentrating in Kufa and Baghdad in Iraq as well as in Qum in Iran.

When the 'Abbāsīds lost the social ground to the sons of 'Alī in Khurasan, they cracked down on the mawālīs, tending to the pro-Ahl al-Ḥadīth policies that would win over the Arab subjects. With this in mind, Caliph Mutawakkil banned public theological debates, taking a negative attitude towards all non-Ahl al-Ḥadīth groups with the Mu'tazilites coming first. Imāmite Shī'ites also suffered from this political tendency. Their exclusion from the center led them to such places as Ray and Nishabur, which were not only far from Baghdad, but also possessed a social foothold to give them

¹⁵ See Avcu, *İslam'ın İlk Marjinalleri Gulat-ı Şia*, 83.

¹⁶ Muḥammad bin al-Qāsim who was regarded as a leader by many people from the regions of Kufa, Tabaristan, Daylam, and Khurasan, rallied around himself many Zaydites. Out of fear, he fled to Khurasan in 219/834. Again, Yahyā bin 'Umar (d. 250/864), who was seen by many historians as the responsible for and leader of the revolts of the sons of 'Alī that erupted in the years 250-51/864-65 in Kufa, Tabaristan, Ray, Qazvin, Egypt and Hijaz, was killed in his final revolt in the rule of Caliph Musta'in (248-252/862-866). The revolt spread even after the murder of Yahyā bin 'Umar, and Ḥasan bin Zayd (d. 270/884), who revolted in the year 250/864, managed to establish a Zaydite dynasty in Tabaristan. Following violent struggles, he won some success in Jurjan. This was followed by many other revolts under the leaderships of Muḥammad bin Ja'far bin al-Ḥasan and Aḥmad bin Īsā al-'Alawī in Ray, Ḥassān bin Ismā'il al-'Alawī in Qazvin, Ismā'il bin Yūsuf in Mecca, and Ḥusayn bin Muḥammad bin Ḥamza al-'Alawī in Kufa. Muḥammed bin Zayd, who succeeded his brother Ḥasan bin Zayd upon his death in the year 270/884, entered Daylam. In the year 257/870-871, al-Ḥusayn bin Zayd al-'Alawī took control of Jurjan. Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, 2/497-498; Mas'ūdī, *Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī bin Ḥusayn, Murūj al-Dhahab wa Madāin al-Jawhar*, critical ed. M. Muḥyiddīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Beirut, 1408/1988), 4/52-53, 147-148; İsfahānī, *Maqātil al-Tālibiyyīn*, 490.

patronage and support¹⁷. Such well-trained Imāmite figures as Faḍl bin Shāzān en-Nīshābūrī (d. 260/873) and Ibn Qibba al-Rhāzī (d. 313/931) gave momentum to Shī'ism thanks to their theological skills in Nishabur and Ray.

2. The Earliest Imāmite Shī'ite Centers in Iran

As one may notice from our discussion so far, a large part of Iranian territory was referred to as Khurasan in the past. This large area received many Arab settlers following its conquest by the Muslims in the caliphate of 'Uthmān. The soldiers and their families settled first in this region, and then some anti-Umayyad northern and southern Arab tribesmen were sent here in exile and forced settlement. They brought their feuds with themselves, maintaining them in these new lands¹⁸.

Any discussion of the rise of Shī'ism in Iran makes it necessary to investigate when, how, and where it appeared. No study of this topic is done in the early period, to our knowledge. The anecdotes extant in the early sources of Islāmīc history provide a general perception of Shī'ism (Rāfiḍiyya), calling no attention to the details. Of these movements, those which evolved into mass movements received particular attention. The sources of Islāmīc heresiography go into some detail, yet they do not provide much information about the regions in which the sects appeared. The contemporary scholarship also tries to reach some conclusions by relying on the literature of Islāmīc history, heresiography, geography¹⁹ as well as on the books by early Shī'ite authors in which they speak of their organization charter and the followers of their imāms²⁰. Yet the information provided by the non-Shī'ite literature is very scattered and scanty. On the other hand, since a large part of Shī'ite literature tended to highlight their sect, they came under the suspicion of exaggerating the actual number of the Shī'ite existence and describing them inaccurately. When the confusions in the geographical names are added to these problems, the issue becomes even more complex. For example, Sabzevar (Bayhaq) and Tus are mentioned with the names of the cities which are located in Nishabur alike. Therefore, one may feel confused about whether a certain sect really exists in a city or a region. The same holds true of such cities as Kashan, Abah, Qazvin, Astarabad, etc.

Since they generally stayed aloof from political actions, Imāmite Shī'ites focused much of their attention on scholarly activities. In this context, after the start of Imāmism's formation in Kufa, its adherents travelled to Madina to attend the teaching

¹⁷ Abū al-Faraj Iṣfahānī (d. 356/966) says as the following: "When Mutawakkil became caliph, the sons of Abū Ṭālib scattered into the neighboring regions. Ḥasan bin Zayd bin Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl bin Zayd took control of Tabaristan and Daylam. Many revolts took place in Ray." Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, 490.

¹⁸ For a detailed information, see Demir, *Horasan'da Şiilik*, 52-53; İlknur Apak, *Abbāsiler (Ebü'l-Abbās es-Seffāh Dönemi)*, (Istanbul: Ensar Yayınevi, 2019), 65-71.

¹⁹ For how the early Muslim geographers considered the sectarian movements in the region, see Betül Yurtalan, *İslam Coğrafyacılarına Göre Mezhepler*, (Ankara: Ankara University, Faculty of Divinity, Master Dissertation, 2015), 97-132.

²⁰ *Horasan'da Şiilik* (Shī'ism in Khurasan) by Habip Demir is one of the most comprehensive studies on the spread of Shī'ism in Iranian geography in Turkish.

sessions of Muḥammad Bāqir and then Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, using this lore to lay the foundation for Imāmite doctrines. In this process, they took over such notions as *iṣma*, *rij'a*, and *ghayba* from the neighboring communities to combine them into their own doctrines. Soon later, they were able to have a center of their own in the city of Qum in Iran which was built by the Arab tribes from Baghdad and Kufa²¹. Although the early Shī'ite notions appeared in Kufa, it was Baghdad in which the Shī'ite Imāmite/Twelver theology flourished, and it was Qum in which the earliest ḥadīth and exegetical books were written. In other words, Qum undoubtedly has always been the center of Shī'ism in Iran. It seems that Shī'ism also made its way into this region through Qum. There are some possible reasons for this. First, Qum is located at the center of Iran, yet it did not have as much commercial and agricultural value as to whet the appetite of the rulers in the region, thus being overshadowed by Ray. This enabled it to protect its independence though it was situated in a location that gave it easy access to other Iranian cities. It was able to maintain its integrity as a closed basin without suffering effects of invasions, and to bring under its influence such neighboring cities as Ray, Kashan, Aveh and Save in the course of time.

Another reason for Qum's importance for Shī'ism in Iran is its demographical character. In the late fourth/tenth century, a geographer and traveller Ibn Ḥawqal (d. 367/977) informs that though they speak Persian, the majority of Qum's population were Shī'ite Arabs²². This place was destroyed probably during the Islāmic conquest and afterwards was re-populated by the Arab Ash'arī tribe who had to leave Kufa in the year 94/712-713 due to their support for the sons of 'Alī. The first settlements were started by Ṭalḥa bin al-Aḥwas al-Ash'arī of this family who moved there in 83/702. Next came the sons of Sa'd bin Mālik bin Āmir al-Ash'arī, who were supporters of 'Abdullāh bin al-Ash'as who revolted against the Umayyad military governor Ḥajjāj. Of these, 'Abdullāh bin Sa'd had a son who was trained in Kufa; according to one certain report, this person was the first to introduce Shī'ism into Qum²³.

The residents of Qum gradually adopted the Imāmite doctrine, and those who refused to adopt it was labeled as "ghulāt (extremists)" and banned from Qum in 255/869 by the leader of the Ash'arite tribe Aḥmad bin Muḥammad. Henceforth, this city became the shelter of Imāmite Shī'ism, replacing Kufa in the late third/ninth century as the most important center for the fabrication of Shī'ite narrations. The

²¹ The Shī'ite ḥadīth scholarship had two important centers in the early years of 'Abbāsīd caliphate: Kufa and Qum, whereas Baghdad was the point of convergence between them. However, Kufa was always in contact with Medina, and Qum was always in contact with Kufa. Therefore, the followers of Imām Bāqir and Imām Ja'far might include a few people from Kufa and Qum. Just as Nishabur and Samarqand were amongst the Shī'ite learning centers, Qum remained the center for the eastern parts of Khurasan. Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Just Ruler (al-Sultan al-Adil) in The Shi'ite Islam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 65.

²² Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Ḥawqal, *Sūrah al-Arḍ (İslam Coğrafyası)*, Turkish trans. Ramazan Şeşen, (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, 2014), 286.

²³ Shihāb al-Dīn Abū 'Abdillāh Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, (Beirut: Dāru Ṣadr, 1397/1977), "Qum", 4/397. Tūsī (d. 460/1067) reports that Sa'd bin Mālik bin al-Aḥwas al-Ash'arī was the first to settle in Qum. See Abū Ja'far Tūsī, *al-Fihrist*, (Najaf: al-Maktabah al-Murtaḍawīyya, n.d.), 25.

ḥadīths about imāmate that were first narrated in Kufa were scrutinized and collected in this city. A glance at the chains of transmitters of the Imāmite/Twelve Shī'ite narrations shows this very clearly²⁴. For example, over eighty-five percent of the ḥadīths occurring in Kulaynī's *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* were narrated by the ḥadīth scholars of Qum. If the ḥadīths that were reported by Kulaynī from his fellow countrymen of Ray were also added to this sum, this rate will rise to around ninety percent²⁵.

The Qumian Shī'ites, isolating themselves from the outside world, built a rather shallow religious structure based on the narrations they collected from Kufa. Therefore, they were criticized not only by their own theologians, but also by non-Shī'ite scholars, and therefore being considered "*ghulāt al-shī'a* (extremist Shī'ites)". The famous Ḥanafite geographer Muqaddasī (d. 390/1000) makes the following remarks on them: "The people of Qum are extremist Shī'ites; they forsook the congregational prayer, yet Rukn al-Dawlah forced them to restore their mosques and attend the congregational prayers there."²⁶

The fact that one of the leading personalities of Qum, 'Abdullāh bin Ja'far al-Ḥimyarī al-Qummī visited Iraq and gave a lecture to the Shī'ite audiences in Kufa in 290/903²⁷ shows how important Qum became for Imāmite Shī'ism. Again the value Qum held for the Imāmite Shī'ites is clearly seen from the fact that it was targeted by the theologically-oriented (*uṣūliyyūn*) Imāmite Shī'ites in Baghdad. The great Imāmite scholar Sheikh Mufīd (d. 413/1022) referred to the scholars of Qum as "the grassroots of Shī'ites (*hashawiyya al-shī'a*)", rejecting their claim that they were the true protectors of Imāmite Shī'ism²⁸.

As one may see from the ongoing discussion, there is not much debate about the decisive position held by Qum for Imāmite Shī'ism since the third/ninth century. However, the focus of the debates is where else Imāmism existed in the aforementioned period. This can be learned regarding the early Shī'ite biographical lexicons like *Rijāl* by Kashshī. Yet, the authors of this literature tend to overrate their scholars and followers in response to the challenges made by the Sunnites. Therefore, it is difficult to reach an accurate conclusion by depending on this literature alone.

A more accurate assessment of the areas in Iran in which Shī'ites concentrated can be made through some other books by the Imāmite Shī'ites. Some of these are hidden between the lines of some of the narrations reported by the early scholars of ḥadīth like Kulaynī (d. 329/941) who lived in the early third/ninth century. For

²⁴ Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, (Edinburg, 1991), 43-44; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, (London: Yale U.P., 1985), 73-74; Wilferd Madelung, "The Source of Ismaili Law", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 35 (1976), 31; Etan Kohlberg, "Şii Hadis", Turkish trans. Mehmet Ali Büyükkara, *Ekev Akademik Dergisi*, 2/2 (2000), 48.

²⁵ Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 82.

²⁶ Muqaddasī, Muḥammad bin Aḥmad, *Aḥsan al-Taḳāsīm fī Ma'rifah al-Aqālīm*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1424/2004), 296.

²⁷ Abū Ja'far Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 102.

²⁸ See Shaikh Mufīd, *Sharḥu 'Aqā'id al-Ṣadūq aw Taṣṭiḥ al-I'tiqād*, (Tabriz, 1371), 33.

example, when speaking of those who doubted the presence of the Twelfth Imām, Aḥmad bin Ishāq of Qum and Muḥammad bin Ibrāhīm bin Mahziyār al-Ahwazī of Ahwaz were mentioned²⁹. Therefore, this narration as reported for different reasons informs us of the presence of Shī'ites in Ahwaz in addition to Qum.

As one may see from the narration, Ahwaz is one of the densely Shī'ite-populated areas at that period. Relying on the observations by Muqaddasī, one can say that half the population of Ahwaz was Shī'ite in the second half of the century. Moreover, Muqaddasī reports sectarian strife between the Shī'ite Marushiyyīn and the Sunnite Faḍliyyīn in this city. For him, the coastal sections of the neighboring Fars region were also dominated by Shī'ites³⁰.

Though the city of Ahwaz as well as its related region of Khuzistan and the coasts of Fars were situated in Iran, they have been considered together with Basra due to their nearness and relations to it. Thus, one should turn his attention further northwards and eastwards in search of the origin of Shī'ism in Iran.

The following report narrated by Kulaynī should be only considered one of the pieces of evidence. In fact, any attempt at investigating the nature of the spread of Shī'ism in Iran can form a scheme that, centering on Qum and Nishabur, expands in several directions³¹. We can learn something from the observations of Muqaddasī (d. 390/1000), who lived some half a century after Kulaynī, though we have difficulty in finding any details. For, as far as Shī'ism is concerned, Muqaddasī seems to focus on what is nowadays described as provinces and on large cities. To the people of whom he speaks, he refers with the generic title "Shī'ite", citing no specified sectarian identities like "Imāmīte", etc. He might be unaware of the details in the regions he visited. Somewhere in his book, he employs the term "extremist Shī'ites (*ghulāt al-shī'a*)"³². Hence, one can infer that the Shī'ites in that region had a fanatic character differing from those in Tabaristan and Daylam.

Since we have difficulty in reaching an accurate conclusion by forming some centers based on the information provided by Muqaddasī, we can elaborate upon some of his reports through some works that were written in a near period by the authors of the same sect. While a contemporary of Muqaddasī, the famous Imāmīte/Twelver scholar Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 381/991), speaks of those who saw the Twelfth Imām, he names, in addition to some figures in Baghdad and Kufa, Muḥammad bin Ibrāhīm bin Mahziyār of Ahwaz, Aḥmad bin Ishāq of Qum, Muḥammad bin Ṣāliḥ of

²⁹ See Kulaynī, *Uṣūl-i Kāfī*, (together with its Persian translation and commentary), critical ed. Sayyid Jawād Muṣṭafā, (Tehran n.d.), 2/455-456.

³⁰ Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taḳāsim*, 309-310, 323.

³¹ As understood from the Imāmīte sources, the followers of the Imāms were geographically divided into four groups: The first included Baghdad, Madain, Sawad and Kufa; the second included Basra and Ahwaz; the third Qum and Hamadan; the fourth included Hijaz, Yemen, and Egypt. Each region was handed over to an independent deputy with many local representatives appointed under him. Jassim Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, (London, 1982), 81-82.

³² Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taḳāsim*, 296.

Hamadan, Bassāmī and al-Asadī of Ray, Qāsim bin ‘Alā of Azerbaijan, and Muḥammad bin Shāzān of Nishabur³³.

Based on this information given by Ibn Bābawayh (Shaikh Ṣadūq) yet for a different purpose, we can say that he had followers, apart from Qum, Nishabur, and Ahwaz, in Ray, Hamadan, and even in Azerbaijan. From the observations above by Bābawayh, one can conclude that, given its nearness to Qum and location on the road to Nishabur, perhaps Ray is one of the most important cities. Ray is presently included in the southern district of Tehran. As one can see from the observations by Ibn Qibba al-Rhāzī (d. 319/931), this area hosted Imāmīte Shī‘ites in the late third/ninth century, too. However, their concentration in Ray seems to have begun not in Ibn Qibba’s period, but later, especially in the Buwayhid period³⁴. The fact that the Imāmīte scholar Ibn Bābawayh came to Ray at the behest of the Buwayhid ruler Rukn al-Dawla (ruled between 331/943-365/976) and spent the last years of his life there strengthened them. Later on, Maḥmūd Ghaznawī captured the city in 420/1029, killing many Bāṭinites (Ismā‘īlites) there. Even the Mu‘tazilites received their share from this massacre and were exiled into Khurasan. It is reported that during this cleansing, the books by philosophers, Mu‘tazilites, and astrologists were also burned³⁵. Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092) gives some details in his account of these incidents and narrates a story that Maḥmūd Ghaznawī killed, along with the Bāṭinites, all of the Daylamites and Rāfiḍites³⁶. His observations make it clear that not only Rāfiḍites but also the entire Shī‘ite population in Ray were seriously affected by these incidents.

The remarks by Muqaddasī suggest that in his age, the overwhelming majority of Ray was composed of the Ḥanafite Najjārīs, while the suburbs were populated by Zafarānīs; he even talks of a Ḥanbalite existence in this area³⁷. These remarks by Muqaddasī, which come just after his description of the residents of Qum as the extremist Shī‘ites, interestingly fail to mention the presence of Shī‘ites in Ray. This suggests that even as late as the end of the fourth/tenth century, though there were some followers of Shī‘ism in Ray, their number was not considerable. Yet, due to the actions Maḥmūd Ghaznawī took to the Shī‘ites a little earlier, in the year 420/1029, when he captured the city, Shī‘ism grew here very fast.

As for Hamadan which Ibn Bābawayh speaks of as another city hosting an Imāmīte group, it lies west of Qum and is not far from it. He points out that the soldiers of this

³³ See Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (Sheikh Ṣadūq), *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Dawlah*, (Qum: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1395/1975), 2/442-443.

³⁴ The historian Ibn Kathīr reports that by the year 347/958, the Rāfiḍism spread everywhere, thanks to the efforts by the Ḥamdanites and Fāṭimītes, the rulers of Egypt, Damascus, Iraq, Khurasan, as well as the majority of the residents of Hijaz and North Africa became Rāfiḍite. ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā Ismā‘īl bin ‘Amr bin Kathīr al-Qurashī al-Dimashqī, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya fī al-Tārīkh*, Turkish trans. Mehmet Keskin, (Istanbul, 1995), 11/399-400.

³⁵ Ibn al-Athīr Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī bin Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shaybānī, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, critical ed. M. Yūsuf Rikāka, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1407/1987), 8/171.

³⁶ Ḥasan bin ‘Alī al-Ṭūsī Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyāsatnāma*, (Tehran: Shirkate Intishārāte ‘Ilmī va Farhangī, 1387), 88.

³⁷ Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm*, 296.

city were adhered to Ahl al-Ḥadīth, whereas Dinavar³⁸ (lying west of it) hosted grassroots who were followers of Sufyān al-Thawrī, as well as some elite groups³⁹. However, he gives no different information about their sect. It seems that even if there were some Imāmites here, their number was very few.

On the other hand, Nishabur, quite far from Qum, located some 900 km east of it, was an important city, to which Sabzevar and Tus were administratively subject at the time. Though it was far, Nishabur is the second earliest Iranian city after Qum in which Imāmite Shī'ism held ground. When Ibn Bābawayh stopped by Nishabur during his return from a visit to the shrine of the eighth Imām 'Alī Riḍā, he observed that the majority of the Shī'ite population conflicted, many Shī'ites were distracted by the issue of *ghayba*⁴⁰. These remarks indicate the presence of a considerable number of Shī'ite population there. This point is verified by the information given by Muqaddasī. He notes that though the majority was Ḥanafites, the Shī'ite population formed a noteworthy existence there⁴¹.

Imāmite Shī'ism had an early history in Nishabur. It was probably carried into these soils by the settlers coming from Qum and its vicinity. The fact that 'Alī al-Riḍā visited Merv and stayed there for a while and that he passed away in returning in 203/818 in Tus is mentioned as a factor for some of his relatives and followers settling there⁴². The famed Imāmite theologian from the tribe of Azd, Faḍl bin Shāzān al-Nishābūrī (d. 260/874), also settled in Nishabur after his studies in Kufa, Baghdad, and Wāsiṭ. He was known for his important works in Shī'ite ḥadīth, jurisprudence, theology as well as for his independent opinions. Shī'ism gained strong support in the city thanks to his debates with other groups in general and with Ahl al-Sunna in particular⁴³. He also wrote an important book titled *Kitāb al-īdāḥ* (The Book of Clarification) in which he answered the criticisms leveled at Shī'ism. He attracted attention because of preferring reason for narrations and was therefore criticized by some Imāmite authors⁴⁴.

The information provided by the sources about Nishabur suggests that this city came second after Qum in importance for the Imāmite Shī'ites in Iran. If we take Nishabur as the center of northeastern Iran, we see some Shī'ite population in further east of this place. For instance, Muḥammad bin Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī (d. 320/932) is one of the most well-known of them. The famous biographer and Mu'tazilite scholar Ibn

³⁸ It is in ruins in the present day.

³⁹ Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taḳāsim*, 296.

⁴⁰ See Ibn Bābawayh, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 1/2-4.

⁴¹ Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taḳāsim*, 248.

⁴² See Demir, *Horasan'da Şiilik*, 84.

⁴³ See Metin Bozan, "Fadl b. Şâzân ve Kitâbu'l-İlel'i Çerçevesinde İmamet Anlayışı, *AÜİFD*, 45/2 (2004), 70; Ümit Toru, "Fazl b. Şâzân'ın Nazarındaki Ehl-i Sünnet'in Şiilik Algısındaki Tutarsızlıklar", *e-makâlât*, 13/1 (2020), 197-248.

⁴⁴ Ash'arī Abū'l-Ḥasan, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, critical ed. M. Muḥyiddīn 'Abdulḥamīd, (Beirut, 1990), 1/134-135; Tūsī, *al-Fihrist*, 124-125.

Nadīm (d. 385/995) notes that the books of ‘Ayyashī, who acquired a considerable amount of scholarship in the Sunnite madrasas in his youth, enjoyed a popular interest in Khurasan⁴⁵. He is originally from Samarqand. But this city is not mentioned with a particular Shī‘ite existence. The fact that he had a famous student like Muḥammad bin ‘Umar al-Kashshī from the town of Kash in Transoxiana shows that Imāmite Shī‘ism was influential in this area. The fact that Ibn Bābawayh reports that he convinced a Shī‘ite from Bukhara who fell into doubt about the concealment of imām (*ghayba*)⁴⁶ indicates the existence of the followers of Imāmism in Bukhara as another important city of Khurasan. Though we have no detailed information on these matters, their existence in this area seems to be not remarkable.

In this context, it is useful to make a brief mention of Azerbaijan, for the southern part of Azerbaijan lies in the modern-day Iranian territory. We see that the group of followers as referred to by Bābawayh is also mentioned by other sources. The famous Zaydite Mu‘tazilite scholar Qāḍī ‘Abduljabbār (d. 415/1025) report that the rulers of such regions Daylam, Azerbaijan, etc. were Shī‘ites who have the belief in imamate. But he gave no details.⁴⁷ This suggests that one can trace the history of Imāmite Shī‘ism in Azerbaijan as far back as the second half of the fourth/tenth century even if their number was very small⁴⁸.

Another noteworthy region for general Shī‘ism in Iran is the region of Jurjan, Tabaristan, and Daylam that covers the south of the Caspian Sea, stretching like a bow from the east to the west. In defining “those Shī‘ites who wait for the infallible Imām as *mahdī*”, Qāḍī ‘Abduljabbār says that they were a large community whose members were found in Iraq, Damascus, Fars, Egypt, North Africa, Hijaz, Yemen, Bahrain, Ahwaz, Jibal, Daylam, and Khurasan⁴⁹. Muqaddasī also speaks of a popular interest in Shī‘ism in Tabaristan and Jurjan. This is also indicated by the texts authored by the famous Imāmite scholars Sheikh Mufīd (d. 413/1022) and Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044) in response to the questions raised by the dwellers of Jurjan. Nevertheless, one can estimate also from the remarks by Qāḍī ‘Abduljabbār that the majority of the population of Jurjan was Ḥanafite, some part of Tabaristan being Ḥanafite, and the rest being Shāfi‘ite and Ḥanbalite⁵⁰.

On the basis of the reports by Qāḍī ‘Abduljabbār and Muqaddasī, we can say that these areas hosted a substantial number of Shī‘ite population. Yet, it is not clear that those followers of Shī‘ism other than the residents of Jurjan were also followers of Imāmism because the Imāmites were not the only Shī‘ite group waiting for an infallible

⁴⁵ Ibn Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Mehmet Yolcu, (Istanbul: Çıra Yayınları, 2017), 517-518.

⁴⁶ See Ibn Bābawayh, *Kamāl al-Dīn*, 1/2-4.

⁴⁷ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, ‘Abd al-Jabbār bin Aḥmad al-Hamadānī, *Tathbītu Dalāil al-Nubuwwah (Mucizelerle Hz. Peygamber’in Hayatı)*, Turkish trans. M. Şerif Eroğlu – Ömer Aydın, ed. Hüseyin Hansu, (Istanbul: TYEKB, 2017), 814-815.

⁴⁸ For more information, see Şahin Ahmadov, *Azerbaycan’da Şiiliğin Yayılma Süreci*, (Ankara: Ankara University, Faculty of Divinity, Ph.D. dissertation, 2005).

⁴⁹ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbītu Dalāil al-Nubuwwah*, 354-355.

⁵⁰ Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm*, 275.

imām as *mahdī*. For example, the Ismā'īlite Qarmaṭians were also waiting for Ismā'īl bin Ja'far. However, I believe that one can talk of the existence of a Shī'ite population in these regions in this period, though their number was small.

To recapitulate our discussion so far, we can say that the first seeds of Imāmīte/Twelver Shī'ism had a substantial existence in the Iranian cities of Qum and Nishabur in particular. As for their presence in other cities, I believe that they existed, though in a small number, in Azerbaijan, Tabaristan, Daylam, Jurjan, Ray, and Hamadan. In addition, given the fact that the geographers on whom we rely for information go into no detail, one can only surmise that a certain number of Shī'ite population existed in some towns neighboring Qum and Nishabur. The Shī'ite biographical literature gives detailed information on this subject, yet that information needs to be confirmed by different sources.

One of the books to be considered in this context is the *Siyāsatnāma* by Niẓām al-Mulk, who lived a century after Ibn Bābawayh and Muqaddasī. Somewhere in his book, he reports that anybody who wanted to come into the presence of the "Turk" was first asked about "his hometown, sect, and ethnicity", if he said that "I am a Shī'ite, from Qum, Kashan, Abah, and Ray," he was denied appearing before him⁵¹.

While Niẓām al-Mulk refers to the dwellers of these regions as "Rāfiḍites", they call themselves "Shī'ite." He is specifically aware of the distinction between the terms Rāfiḍites and Qarmaṭians (Bāṭinites). Even worse as he considers the Bāṭinites to be, he tells some stories that suggest that the Rāfiḍites were not less evil than Bāṭinites, trying to support this view through some reports that he thinks to come from the Prophet Muḥammad⁵².

The information that was given by Niẓām al-Mulk nearly a century after Muqaddasī mentions Ray, Kashan, and Abah as significant cities, apart from Qum. That Bāṭinism/Ismā'īlism found a substantial number of followers in Ray, even in the entire Khurasan, in this period, is suggested by his own words. Some of them might be Imāmīte, yet one cannot be sure of this. On the other hand, the cities of Kashan, Abah, and Save were under the Imāmīte Shī'ite influence from the very beginning. These places seemed to have received no attention or have been regarded as the vicinity of Qum because they were close to Qum and were not particularly important for centrality. His failure to make mention of Nishabur does not suggest that he thought that the Rāfiḍites did not exist there, for the information given by him was not intended to name the cities of Rāfiḍites (Shī'ites).

With a reference to the information provided by Niẓām al-Mulk, I have tried to outline the first five centuries of Shī'ism in Iran. If we want to investigate the course of Imāmīte Shī'ism and its manner of spread in the centuries to follow, we need to look

⁵¹ Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyāsatnāma*, 216.

⁵² See Niẓām al-Mulk, *Siyāsatnāma*, 215-216, 219.

to other authors. In this context, *Kitāb al-Naqḍ* by ‘Abduljalīl Qazvīnī (d. 585/1189), who is an Imāmīte/Twelvever Shī‘ite, is of special importance.

‘Abduljalīl Qazvīnī wrote that book in refutation of a certain Shāfi‘ite person who abandoned Shī‘ism and then leveled criticisms at it⁵³. He lived under the Great Seljukid rule in Iran in Ray in a period in which Ismā‘īlism (Bāṭinism) was very influential. That place in his life period, that is, in a relatively long period spanning until the late sixth/twelfth century, was under the control of the Great Seljuk Empire, which made great efforts, both political and institutional, to contain Shī‘ism in general and Ismā‘īlites/Bāṭinites in particular. This led them to go underground more and more⁵⁴, other Shī‘ite groups seeming to remain limited to their regions in this process⁵⁵.

Due to his sectarian tendencies, ‘Abduljalīl Qazvīnī might have given exaggerated information, especially about Shī‘ism. Yet, considering the general character of the period and other factors combined, we can reach important findings through his reports. One may reasonably think that Imāmītes/Twelvever Shī‘ites, before the Seljukid domination, had tended to spread in small groups from the west to the east in the greater part of the Muslim world that was under the control of the Fāṭimids, the Ḥamdānids, and the Buwayhids. ‘Abduljalīl Qazvīnī describes the *Uṣūlī* Shī‘ite-populated⁵⁶ places as the following: Aleppo and its vicinity as well as Harran in the district of Damascus, Bahrain, Baghdad and Kufa in Iraq, the triangle of Qum, Kashan, and Abeh (Aveh) in Iran, Jurjan, Astarabad (in Jurjan), and Sabzevar (in Nishabur) in the east, Mazandaran, Tabaristan (Sari and Uram), and Ray (especially Muslihghāh and Varamin) in the north as well as the towns in the vicinity of Qazvin⁵⁷.

In listing the places visited and mosques attended by Shī‘ites, ‘Abduljalīl Qazvīnī mentions the tombs of Sayyid ‘Abdul‘azīm, Abū ‘Abdillāh al-Abyaḍ, and Sayyid Ḥamza al-Mūsawī in Ray, that of Fāṭima bintu Mūsā Kāzīm in Qum, that of ‘Alī bin Muḥammad Bāqir in Kashan, those of Faḍl and Suleymān of the sons of Mūsā Kāzīm in Ave, and that of Abū ‘Abdillāh el-Ḥusayn bin al-Riḍā⁵⁸. The construction of mosques around these tombs is a sign that these places were adopted as settlements by Shī‘ites. Yet, whether the Shī‘ites came to these places because there were tombs or the tombs were built after the Shī‘ite concentration is a matter of debate. Especially the Zaydite dynasty in Tabaristan and the Buwayhid rulers made serious efforts to build these shrines. The

⁵³ As a review of this book, see Hasan Apaydın, “Abdulcelil el-Kazvinî’nin “en-Nakz” Adlı Eseri ve Şiiler Hakkındaki Bilgiler”, *Turkish Journal of Shiite Studies*, 1/1 (2019), 54-81.

⁵⁴ With the capture of the Alamut Castle towards the end of the thirteenth century, this course has continued. The scattered Nizārī Ismā‘īlites, far from their imāms and rallied around their local leaders holding the title of “dā‘ī” or “pīr”, disguised themselves amongst some esoterically oriented Sufi groups. Daftary, *İsmaililer, Tarih ve Kuram*, 480.

⁵⁵ For a detailed information on the Seljuk territory into which Shī‘ism spread, see Adem Arıkan, *Selçuklular Döneminde Şîa*, (Istanbul: Istanbul University, Divinity Faculty, Ph.D. dissertation, 2010), 80-105.

⁵⁶ He seems to mean those Imāmīte/Twelvever Shī‘ites who are not extremists or Ismā‘īlites.

⁵⁷ ‘Abduljalīl al-Qazvīnī, Abū al-Rashīd Naşiruddīn, *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*, (Tehran: Anjomane Āthāre Millī, 1358), 34, 194-202, 437.

⁵⁸ Qazvīnī, *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*, 588-589.

fact that the earliest sources which give information on these shrines called the "shrines of Imāmzāda" go only as far back as the Seljuk era, caused to think that they were fabricated in later periods⁵⁹.

Relying on the information provided by 'Abduljalīl Qazvīnī, we can infer that there were Twelver Shī'ites in Qum and its vicinity, Ray, Qazvin, Mazandaran, Tabaristan, Jurjan, Astarabad, and Sabzevar (Bayhaq)⁶⁰. In other words, we see a Twelver expansion northwards and eastwards, in addition to its existence in Qum.

Interestingly, 'Abduljalīl Qazvīnī implies that Twelvers have no considerable existence in Azerbaijan. According to his report, the towns of Iranian Azerbaijan as well as Hamadan, Isfahan, Save, and Qazvin were overwhelmed by Shāfi'ites, and not Shī'ites. Yemen, Hijaz, Kufa, some North African towns, the districts of Jibal and Daylaman were followers of Zaydism. Most of the Iraqi towns, the east of Nishabur, as well as the entire region stretching southwards down to India were followers of Ḥanafism⁶¹.

As we have already pointed out, the Imāmite/ Shī'ites population made some progress thanks to the political situation in the fourth/ten century. Their rise, however, seems to have come to a halt as a result of the Ghaznavid and then Seljukid control of Iran. Yet, the latter's dominion did not last long, the Ilkhanates taking over the control of this region as of the year 653/1256.

The Ilkhanate support for the Imāmite/Twelver Shī'ites especially in the beginning is well-known⁶². We see the Imāmite Shī'ites progress though a little in Iran⁶³. Signs of this can be seen in *Nuzha al-Qulūb* by Ḥamdullāh Mustawfī (d. 750/1350), who functioned in the service of Sultan Öljaitü. He reports that Ray hosted both Sunnites and Shī'ites, but most of it was populated by the Twelver Shī'ites except for some settlements. For him, Qazvin and Isfahan hosted both Sunni and Shī'ite populations. There was a substantial number of Shī'ite population in Tus, Nishabur, Herat, and Balkh. A small number of them also lived in the province of Fars⁶⁴. Nearly one century and a half before the Safavid period, in the eighth/fourteenth century, the

⁵⁹ See Demir, *Horasan'da Şiiilik*, 95-100.

⁶⁰ As one may see, he, somewhere in his work, lists the Twelver Shī'ites according to their cities with their salient features. Of them, the groups in the following cities are noteworthy: Astarabad, Dahistan, Jurjan, Nishabur, Sabzevar, Uram, Sari, Habe, Kashan, Qazvin, Qum, Ave and Daylaman. Qazvīnī, *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*, 437.

⁶¹ Qazvīnī, *Kitāb al-Naqḍ*, 111, 122-127, 459.

⁶² The fact that the Ilkhanate Gazan Khan (d. 1295-1304) tended to Shī'ism shows the existence of Shī'ism in some parts of Azerbaijan. As a result of this and the policies of Sultan Öljaitü (d. 1304-1317), Shī'ism made even more progress. Shahi Ahmedov, *Azerbaycan'da Şiiiliğin Yayılma Süreci*, 27-29.

⁶³ For a detailed information on the lands of Shī'ite dissemination during the Ilkhanate rule (653/1256-735/1335), see Hanifi Şahin, *İlhanlılar Döneminde Şiiilik*, (Istanbul: Ötüken Yayınları, 2010), 193-194.

⁶⁴ Ḥamdullāh Mustawfī, Ebū Bakr bin Aḥmad b. Nāşir, *Nuzha al-Qulūb*, critical ed. by Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāqī, (Tehran: Kutubkhāna-e Tūhūrī, 1336/1917), 53, 59, 62-63, 138, 185-187.

major cities of Twelver Shī'ism were Isfahan, Tus, Herat, and Balkh. This implies that thanks to the Ilkhanate support, the Twelver Shī'ites expanded into new cities.

Of these, Tus was not much mentioned earlier, for it was probably considered part of Nishabur. Since it was next to Mashhad which was honored by the shrine of 'Alī al-Riḍā, Tus was a favorable place for Shī'ites. Its importance increased with the building of a big mosque by the Buwayhids in the place where 'Alī al-Riḍā's tomb was located. Tus is also the hometown of Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), who is one of the prominent scholars of Twelver Imāmism. This sect seems to have influenced the Herat and Balkh of modern-day Afghanistan. As for Isfahan, one can see that it gained importance in political and commercial terms from the Seljukid period onwards, and thus some Twelver Shī'ites moved there.

In the reports by Ḥamdullāh Mustawfī, Ray is another significant city. Imāmites had been minority at least until the fourth/tenth century in this city. Yet, the anecdotes of different dates indicate that their population constantly increased there. Even by the time of Ḥamdullāh Mustawfī, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) as one of the authors of one century and a half earlier, had reported that the majority of Ray that was composed of three districts was Shī'ite, the rest being mostly Ḥanafites along with a small group of Shāfi'ites. For he believed that half the counties of the city were composed of Shī'ites. In Rustak (subject to Ray)⁶⁵, Shī'ites were the majority, the rest being Ḥanafites. After the long-lasting conflicts between the Shī'ites and the Sunnite Ḥanafites-Shāfi'ites, the Sunnites emerged victorious; but afterwards, the Shāfi'ites and the Ḥanafites fought a war from which the former emerged victorious. Ḥamawī reports that following the Shāfi'ite triumph, no Shī'ite and Ḥanafite existed except for those who concealed their sectarian identity⁶⁶.

To conclude, Imāmite Shī'ism which bloomed in Ray in the fifth/eleventh century was halted by the Ghaznavids and Seljukids, yet the situation changed following the fall of the Seljuk dynasty. Thanks to the support by the Ilkhanates who replaced the Seljuks, Shī'ites appeared on stage again, beginning to constitute the majority of the population of the city. This was perhaps the Shī'ite domination of one of the largest Iranian cities.

Of the cities cited above, one should also call attention to Qazvin, which was described as the stronghold of Shāfi'ism in the reports by 'Abduljalīl Qazvīnī. Minhāj al-Sirāj al-Juzjānī (d. after 664/1266), who witnessed the Mongol Invasion, shares the same opinion of this city. In his reports, "the Castle (of Alamut) was located on top of a mountain near the city of Qazvin, all of whose residents were followers of the creed of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a, with a clean faith and a pure belief. Because of the heresy of Bāṭinites and heretics, a war constantly raged between them..." Ḥamdullāh

⁶⁵ It is a town subject to Ray which falls within the borders of Tehran in the present day.

⁶⁶ Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, 3/116-117.

Mustawfī (d. 750/1350)⁶⁷, however, one century and a half later, reports that Sunnites and Shī'ites coexisted in Qazvin. We do not know whether by Shī'ites he meant Bāṭinites/Ismā'īlites or Twelvers, who appeared there later on. Yet, it seems more probable that they might be Bāṭinites/Ismā'īlites who pretended to be or were converted into Twelver Shī'ism.

Conclusion

As an attempt at delineating the background of Imāmism/Twelver Shī'ism in Iran, this study is intended to identify the differences between the modes of Imāmism as it crystallized in the third/ninth century and then flourished in the eighth/fourteenth century. The subsequent period became rather complicated due to the social and political chaos triggered by the Mongol Invasion. Until the tenth/sixteenth century when the Safavid dynasty came into power, a series of complexities took place. Certain Shī'ite groups came to merge with some Sufi movements. Therefore, the post-Mongol period of Shī'ite history in Iran should be investigated separately.

The introduction of Imāmism/Twelver Shī'ism into Iran runs parallel to the formation of the Shī'ite Imāmite ḥadīth literature that was produced in Qum in the second phase of its configuration. The first phase was inaugurated by the introduction of some extremist doctrines in Kufa of Iraq and then discussion of them by such theologians as Hishām bin al-Ḥakam and 'Alī bin Mitham al-Tammār in such centers as Kufa and Baghdad. The Arabs of Yemenite origin who immigrated from Kufa to Qum carried the lore formed in the former to the latter. This Qum-centered Shī'ism in Iran made progress in some areas that were in contact with Kufa and Baghdad.

To speak in very general terms, Qum's becoming the center of Imāmite Shī'ism in Iran starts in the late third/ninth century. In this period, the followers of Imāmite Shī'ism seemed to exist in the region of Nishabur (Sabzevar and Tus), as well as in Ahwaz and the coasts of Fars. Towards the end of the fourth century, Imāmism made some progress in Tabaristan, Daylam, Jurjan, Hamadan, Ray, Azerbaijan, and, though to a lesser degree, in some parts of Transoxiana. By the end of the fifth/eleventh century, such towns as Kashan and Abeh (Aveh) near Qum had become followers of Imāmism, their population having possibly increased in Ray. By the sixth/twelfth century, they had grown even more to acquire the majority in Ray, gaining a considerable number of followers in Qazvin, Mazandaran, and Tabaristan (Sari and Uram) in the north and Astarabad and Jurjan in the northeast. In the seventh/thirteenth century, when the Ilkhanates came into power, the Imāmite Shī'ites began to appear in Isfahan, too, maintaining their control of Ray in which, being one of the largest cities of the time, they reached majority one century earlier; in further east, they reached Herat and Balkh, which are located in the territory of present-day Afghani. In fact, Imāmite Shī'ism held ground in the first place in Qum and

⁶⁷ Minhāj-i Sirāj al-Jūzjānī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, Turkish trans. by Mustafa Uyar, (Istanbul: Ötüken, 2016), 143-144.

the neighboring area, as well as the region of Nishabur, never shrinking after it held ground over there. In answer to the question of whether Shī'ism retreated in any regions, one may name Azerbaijan and Hamadan; however, they are not clearly so.

To summarize, Imāmite/Twelve Shī'ism gained a considerable amount of prevalence in Iran within this span of four centuries. What underlies the conversion of the Ilhanate rulers into Shī'ism might be this popular inclination to Shī'ism.

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