THE SCHISM IN THE PARTY OF MŪSĀ AL-KĀZĪM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE WÂQĪFA

BY

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This study aims to investigate the schism that had taken place in the Imāmī-Šīʿa community after the death of the Imām Mūsā al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799). The largest split was caused by a group called the Wâqīfa.

Despite the fact that this split was one of the important incidents in the history of Šīʿism because it was long-lasting and of quite serious dimensions, no comprehensive academic work examining it has yet been done in Western languages. I. Friedlaender, in 1908, gave some brief information about the Wâqīfa in his commentary on his translation of a section of Ibn Ḥazm’s al-Fiṣal about Islamic sects. Rajkowski was perhaps the first author to write some important historical facts about the Wâqīfa. He, after outlining different Wâqīfī groups, suggests that these groups were probably not separate sub-groups of the sect; they only represented various opinions as to the real meaning of al-Kāzīm’s concealment and his future role as the Qāʿīm. M. Watt is another scholar who paid brief attention to the sect. The information given by Watt was largely derived from two sources; Firaq al-Šīʿa of al-Nawbāḥṭī and the Fihrist of al-Ṭūsī. J. Hussain mentioned briefly the roles of some of al-Kāzīm’s agents in the emergence of the Wâqīfa.

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Ess, when he examined the relation between Hārūn al-Raṣīd and the Šīʿa, gave some brief information on the wakāla system of al-Kāẓim and cited several Imāmī traditions about al-Kāẓim’s Wāqifī agents.  

W. Madelung has written about the early Šīʿī belief of the Qāʿīm and, in this regard, briefly examined the Wāqifī belief of the Qāʿīm. He emphasises that some of the Wāqifī traditions were later used by the Twelver Šīʿa when they declared that the Twelfth Imām was the Qāʿīm. Madelung also gives the names of some of the Wāqifī scholars who wrote on the ḡayba. M.A. Amir-Moezzi has also recorded the authors and titles of some Wāqifī and Qāʿī works which were probably written for polemical purposes. H. Modarressi, when he investigated the crisis of succession in the Imāmī party, has touched on the Wāqifī sect. His two large footnotes about the Wāqifa contain some valuable information. There is no entry on the Wāqifa in the first edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam (EI¹). In its second edition (EI²), an entry on the sect is expected to appear soon.

There is no adequate information about the extremist Wāqifā, the Baṣrīyya, in English. In German, H. Halm wrote a remarkable chapter on Muḥammad b. Baṣīr, the founder of the sect. Despite the fact that the proclamation of Aḥmad b. Mūsā’s imāmate firstly took place just after al-Kāẓim’s death, no works traced this when they investigated this period of crisis. This article aims to examine these splits within the Imāmī party by using all the information available in the sources.

The Wāqifa

When Mūsā al-Kāẓim b. Ǧaʿfar al-Ṣādiq died in 183/799, a big division took place within the Imāmī community. A considerable number of people who followed some prominent disciples of al-Kāẓim denied the death of the Imām and declared that he had gone into occultation (ḡayba) and would come back some day as the Qāʿīm to restore justice and equity on earth. They also refused to accept the imāmate of ṬAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā whom was claimed by some to have succeeded

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