



Obeying Those in Authority: the Hidden Political Message in Twelver Exegesis

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*Obeying Those in Authority:
The Hidden Political Message in Twelver Exegesis*

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Committee on Middle Eastern Studies

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for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

In the tenth century, a confluence of two unrelated events shaped the Twelver Shī'a community in Baghdad: the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām in 939/329 and the takeover of Baghdad in 945 by the Buyid princes, who were largely tolerant towards their Shī'a subjects. Twelver intellectual life flourished during this era, led by the exegetes who are the subject of this dissertation. Chief among them were al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, who – along with many of their contemporaries – comprised a “Baghdad school” of Twelver intellectuals. This dissertation analyzes the Qur’ānic commentaries (*tafsīr*) written by this core group of medieval Twelver exegetes, most of whom lived and wrote in Baghdad, although others – such as al-‘Ayyāshī – remained on the margins.

Although they were written in the aftermath of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām, none of the exegetical works examined here mention the Occultation. In interpretations of the phrase “those in authority among you,” as well as in commentaries on who should receive the *khums* tax meant for Muḥammad’s descendents, the exegetes name the Imām as both the only true authority and as the rightful recipient of the tax. This discussion of the Imām as a present and living figure stands in stark

contrast to the more pragmatic treatment of the Imām's absence in non-exegetical works, in which the same authors give detailed instructions for tax distribution and frankly discuss the legality of working for authorities other than the Imām.

The differences between exegesis and non-exegesis illustrate the unique nature of the *tafsīr* genre. The authors are an elite group within an already elite group of religious scholars, and the knowledge required to read their *tafsīr* strongly implies that they address themselves to their own small community of exegetes. The emphasis in these texts on the continued presence of the Twelfth Imām suggests that medieval exegetes viewed *tafsīr* as a genre that had to have longevity and relevance throughout a timespan that would include the Imām's return. Finally, the exegetes clearly viewed the project of authoring Qur'ānic commentaries as a pietistic act, in which they faithfully expressed their religious commitments.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I arrived at Harvard University in the fall of 2008 with the intention of studying the ways in which the Twelver Shī'a community shifted its ideas about leadership and authority in the aftermath of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām. However, I was unsure how to approach the topic until the spring of 2009, when I took Roy P. Mottahedeh's seminar on medieval Islamic political thought, viewed through the lens of "mirrors for princes" literature. Hossein Modarressi delivered a guest lecture for the course, in which he discussed al-Ṭabarī's exegesis on Q 4:59 and the various interpretations al-Ṭabarī gives for the phrase "those in authority among you."

In the same semester, I read *tafsīr* for the first time in a course taught by Carl Sharif el-Tobgui, and I soon discovered the approach I wished to use in this dissertation. Each week when I arrived at Roy Mottahedeh's office hours to read Shī'a *tafsīr*, I would ask if he had a moment to spare and be greeted with the response, "for you I have many moments!" He has unfailingly provided feedback on each draft – from correcting translations and transliterations to suggesting additional sources and discussing the substantive arguments in this dissertation. This project could not have succeeded were it not for his kindness and encouragement.

Throughout graduate school, Daniel Smail continually asked the questions about framework and methodology that broadened the scope of my dissertation beyond

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INTRODUCTION

Tafsīr, or Qur'ānic exegesis, is but one of a great number of Islamic sciences, and most of its authors have made contributions to many other genres of Islamic studies.

In "The Shu'ubiyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran," Roy

Mottahedeh writes that Qur'ānic commentaries :

provide a copious and almost untouched source of information for the opinions of Muslims in every age on social and political ideas. Virtually all Muslim controversialists tried to find proof texts in the Qur'ān; and since Qur'ān commentaries are one of the largest and best distributed branches of Arabic prose literature, they give a fairly continuous and geographically broad view of the ideas considered important enough to need Qur'ānic proof.¹

To illustrate the point that *tafsīr* is a nearly untouched source, we may recall that Abū

Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (838-923) wrote both a history (*tārīkh*) and a *tafsīr*.

However, of the two multi-volume works, a version of al-Ṭabarī's *tārīkh* has been

translated into English, while only the first part of his *tafsīr* has been translated.

Karen Bauer writes that "the length of a work has obvious ramifications for its accessibility and its place in any educational program, and length is a factor mentioned

¹ Roy P. Mottahedeh, "The Shu'ubiyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (April, 1976): 163-4.

by many exegetes in their introductions.”² I can only speculate that perhaps historians have shied away from *tafsīr* because they have viewed it as a collection of texts written for religious purposes within religious contexts. Instead, I would suggest that we look at *tafsīr* as a conversation occurring over a span of years and miles, a conversation that takes a Qur’ānic verse as a starting point of utmost importance and then provides a vibrant discussion and analysis of ambiguous terms and phrases.

Tafsīr is commentary on a fixed textual point; each commentator provides an interpretation of the same terms (*ūlī ’l-amr*, *khums*, etc.), and reading exegesis will give us insight into Shī’a scholarship’s construction of political authority following the Greater Occultation of the Twelfth Imām. An examination of Shī’a Qur’ānic commentary, written just after the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām in 939/329, will explore how Twelver Shī’a exegetes conceived of authority in the period just prior to the Greater Occultation of the Twelfth Imām and in its aftermath.

The first chapter of this dissertation addresses the historical context in which Twelver Shī’a exegetes crafted notions of political theory and used their Qur’ānic commentaries to articulate their political commitments. This chapter will evaluate the extent to which contemporary politics – especially the reigns of the ‘Abbāsids, Buyids,

² Karen Bauer, “‘I Have Seen the People’s Antipathy to This Knowledge’: The Muslim Exegete and His Audience, 5th/11th–7th/13th Centuries,” in *The Islamic Scholarly Tradition: Studies in History, Law, and Thought in Honor of Professor Michael Allan Cook*, eds. Asad Q. Ahmed, Behnam Sadeghi, and Michael Bonner (Boston: Brill, 2011), 297.

and Seljuqs – influenced the Twelver exegetes and motivated them to hide their true opinions of legitimate authority in the more esoteric genre of *tafsīr*.

This chapter discusses medieval and modern biographical dictionaries to gain greater insight into the characters of the Twelver Shī'a exegetes and how they perceived themselves and each other within the community of religious scholars. It may be useful to consider the *mufasssīrūn* as a small, specialized group within the broader category of medieval Muslim scholars – the '*ulamā*'. In *Loyalty and Leadership*, Mottahedeh notes that, during the Buyid period, the '*ulamā*' was "a vaguely defined body of men whose other identities – as landlords, members of city factions, and so on – often overrode their common identification as ulema."³ However, despite the diverse and decentralized nature of the '*ulamā*', it was still a category that implied privilege, as a life devoted to scholarship was prohibitively expensive to most.⁴

The second chapter of this dissertation translates and analyzes the introduction that Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥassan al-Ṭūsī (d.460/1067), one of the most influential and prolific scholars of early Shī'ism, wrote to his work of Qur'ānic exegesis, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī provides a model for other scholars to follow in their own

³ Roy P. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1980), 137.

⁴ Mottahedeh writes that "families whose ancestors had exercised *riyāṣah* in the bureaucracy or the army of the central government did not produce many leading men of religious learning." Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 135.

exegetical endeavors and argues that the Qur'ān and the Imāmate were both left by Muḥammad to be present for the rest of time. Al-Ṭūsī does not mention the Occultation in the verses examined here and, instead, stresses the continued existence of the Imāmate.

A verse with particular significance for determining authority in Islam (in both Sunnī and Shī'a contexts) is the fifty-ninth verse of the fourth sūra of the Qur'ān, *Sūrat al-Nisa'*, which reads: "O you who believe, obey God, and obey His Messenger, and those in authority among you, and if you disagree in any matter, refer it to God and His Messenger, if you believe in God and the last day. This is better and more seemly in the end." The most interesting aspect of the commentaries – for our purposes – is how the exegetes interpreted the phrase "those in authority" (*ūlī 'l-amr*). The third chapter in this dissertation will examine commentary by the aforementioned exegetes on this verse.

Even better than knowing who the commentators call their leader as they interpret Qur'ān 4:59 is finding out which individual or individuals the exegetes believed should receive taxes from the Shī'a community. To that end, the fourth chapter of this dissertation focuses on the commentary on verse 41 of the eighth Sūra, *Sūrat al-Anfāl*, which reads "Know that whatever you acquire as material gain, a fifth belongs to God and to the Prophet and to those related and the orphans and the poor and the wayfarers." This chapter will examine Shī'a interpretations of this verse, especially the

various definitions of “those related,” as well as solutions for dealing with the *khums* tax in the aftermath of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām.

This dissertation argues that the *tafsīr* written by Twelver Shī'a commentators during the Buyid and Seljuq eras displays a disregard for censorship that the authors in question are able to enjoy – not because of the permissive environment created by their political overlords – but due instead to the uniqueness of the *tafsīr* genre. Although they lived after the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām and devoted other texts to this phenomenon, the commentaries of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d.413/1020), al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d.436/1044), and Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154) fail to acknowledge the Twelfth Imām's absence – both when naming the Imām as the one meant by the phrase “those in authority among you” (discussed in the third chapter) and when naming the Imām as proper recipient of the *khums* tax (discussed in the fourth chapter).

Taken at face value, the omission of the Occultation seems like evidence of dissimulation (*taqiyya*) – an attempt to avoid naming a living authority who might pose a challenge to the temporal powers of the day. But why bother with dissimulation in a religious text written for the faithful, especially when these same authors have written well-known and more easily accessed works that give in-depth treatments to the Occultation, fully acknowledging the Imām's absence? In my reading, these

commentaries do *not* display *taqiyya*; rather, they reveal the exegetes at their most politically radical and uncensored: the exegetes truly believe that the only authority who deserves fealty is one who is sinless.

For our commentators, even a hidden Imām is a far more legitimate and effective authority than any ruler who is present. However, writing this view in a shorter treatise or even in a more accessible legal book would have been highly imprudent. Therefore it is in *tafsīr* that the exegetes are able to claim that the only legitimate authority is sinless, thereby implying that the only legitimate authority is the absent Imām. *Tafsīr* (itself a more exclusive and lengthy genre)⁵ perhaps reflects the authentic priorities and values of its authors, while their other writings exhibit caution and reticence. It is unlikely that even those who were educated sufficiently to work in the bureaucracies of Baghdad would have had the ability – let alone the time – to wade through the volumes of *tafsīr* that contemporary exegetes were producing. We may never know definitively that medieval *tafsīr* was written by the exegetes and for the exegetes; however, the political message embedded in Twelver exegesis during the Buyid and Seljuq eras strongly suggests that the intended audience of *tafsīr* was, in fact, contemporary authors of the genre, i.e., the community of *mufasssīrūn*.

⁵ This is not always the case, as there are commentaries that are shorter in length (such as the Jalalayn) or that deal with limited subject matter. However, the *tafsīr* addressed in this dissertation are multi-volume works that treat each verse of the Qur’ān.

Meir Bar Asher argues that Shī'a exegetes believe that the Qur'ān itself contains "secret language" that refers to the Shī'a Imāms, and Bar Asher also writes that the exegete "not only avoids disclosing the secrets of the text but actually further conceals them from us."⁶ Bar Asher proves this point by mentioning the "derogatory appellations directed at the enemies of the Shī'a."⁷ However, in arguing that the exegetes intentionally conceal the meanings of the Qur'ān and, thereby, their own true opinions of the text, Bar Asher neglects to mention how the Shī'a commentators address the leaders of their own community and their own positive beliefs. The fourth chapter will address censorship and the forms that it took during the 'Abbāsīd and Buyīd eras, as related in contemporary chronicles and heresiographies, in an effort to situate the Twelver Shī'a in the context of minority groups that would have undergone scrutiny and, at times, suspicion.

⁶ Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1999), 114.

⁷ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 114.

CHAPTER ONE

Twelver Shī'a Hermeneutics in Medieval Baghdad: Some Historical Background

The Occultation of the Twelfth Imām

In the year 632, in the western Arabian peninsula, Muḥammad – founder and leader of the Islamic political and religious community – passed away with no designated male heir. Upon Muḥammad's death, the Muslim community split into factions, each with its own candidate for leadership. Soon, though, the community more or less agreed that it would only follow one leader, and one of Muḥammad's companions, Abū Bakr (everyone's second choice), became caliph. Wilferd Madelung, in *The Succession to Muḥammad* (1997), offers a Shī'a interpretation of these events, challenging the generally accepted narrative that 'Alī agreed to Abū Bakr's succession and that the only protest came from 'Alī's followers.⁸ Instead, Madelung argues that 'Alī and Abū Bakr had a pre-existing rivalry⁹ and that 'Alī only accepted Abū Bakr as caliph after Fatima's death.¹⁰

⁸ Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

⁹ Madelung suggests that this conflict was due to 'Alī's stance against Aīsha in the *ifk* episode. Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad*, 42.

¹⁰ Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad*, 52.

Although the community of Muslims largely accepted Abū Bakr, there were still some who wished to see the family of Muḥammad become their leaders. The chance came in 655, when the third caliph, 'Uthmān, was assassinated, and 'Alī – Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law – was proclaimed caliph. 'Alī was assassinated a few years later, and most of the Muslim community acknowledged Mu'āwiyah, ('Uthmān's nephew and the governor of Damascus) and his descendents as their leaders, who reigned as Umayyad caliphs until the 'Abbāsīd Revolution in the year 750. In addressing the early split between the supporters of 'Alī and their opponents, Patricia Crone writes that the conflict was initially over which of Muḥammad's companions should have been his successor. Crone argues that, although the debate is seemingly only about political power, it also has religious implications, since choosing a leader is tantamount to choosing a path to salvation.¹¹

Throughout both Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd rule, a minority of Muslims still followed the family of Muḥammad, specifically, 'Alī's descendents. Hossein Modarressi's *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī'ite Islam* is perhaps the most important and thorough characterization of the Imāmī Shī'a community in the time leading up to the Greater Occultation of the Twelfth Imām in 329/939. Modarressi describes the imāmate, beginning at the time of the 'Abbāsīd Revolution in 750, at which point "the Shī'ite movement had... grown into a complete and independent political, legal, and theological

¹¹ Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 21.

school."¹² At this point, elements within the Muslim community (often called exaggerators, extremists, or *ghulat*)¹³ often attributed divine or prophet-like qualities to the imāms, leaving no question about the importance, political or otherwise, that they attributed to the imām.

Crone argues that, in addition to descent, Imāmī Shī'a believed that the imāms possessed a knowledge that was distinct from both political power and "legal instruction,"¹⁴ and that this knowledge was what gave them special status. Crone considers the emphasis placed on knowledge as evidence of Gnostic influence in Imāmī Shī'ism, and she argues that gnosticism, as interpreted through an Imāmī Shī'a lens, may account for the diminished importance of political power, which eventually culminated in the end of the need for a physically present Imām.¹⁵

Both Modarressi and Crone address the decreasing political importance of the Imām. Crone tracks the process by which the Imām began to be "defined by his personal

¹² Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam*, (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1993), 4.

¹³ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 20.

¹⁴ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 83.

¹⁵ The lack of emphasis on political action is unique to Imāmī Shī'ism, and it stands in stark contrast to other sects, such as Zaydīs, who believed that any descendent of Ḥassan or Ḥussein "endowed with legal learning, piety, courage, and political ability who called for allegiance to himself with a view to taking over government thereby became the imam." Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 102.

quality (above all his descent), not by his political power,"¹⁶ explaining that these imāms were "men who had never been, or even tried to become, caliphs."¹⁷ Despite the attribution of political significance to the Sixth Imām, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), on the part of some of his followers, Ja'far maintained an apolitical attitude. Modarressi contrasts this lack of political involvement with Ja'far's successor, Mūsa al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799),¹⁸ and Crone also notes that Mūsa al-Kāẓim presided over a brief period of limited political action, and "turned his followers into a religious community with its own sovereign-to-be, its own taxes, and its own hierarchy of administrators."¹⁹ Imāmī participation in politics perhaps reached its apex when 'Abbāsīd caliph Ma'mūn appointed the Eighth Imām, 'Alī al-Riḍa, as his successor in 201/817, but 'Alī died – under suspicious circumstances – the following year when Ma'mūn realized how unpopular this decision was with his subjects.

The Shī'a community debated whether 'Alī al-Riḍa's heir, a minor, could succeed him as Imām, and Modarressi argues that the solution "further downgraded the political aspect of the office," since it "involved the suggestion that the Imām became the Imām

¹⁶ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 83.

¹⁷ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 82.

¹⁸ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 9-10.

¹⁹ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 115.

through divine grace."²⁰ Modarressi writes that a "vast body of theological and legal literature existed" that, for the most part, was able to stand in place of in imām and fulfill his function of answering the community's questions on religious matters.²¹ The crux of Crone's argument regarding Shī'a political involvement is that, at this point, "just as the imām was no longer required to wield political power, so he did not really have to be an adult scholar any more, his work having been taken over by central and local hierarchies of scholars and administrators. There was, in fact, no need for the imām to be present at all."²² It is at this time, once the functions of the Imām have been obviated, that the disappearance of the Twelfth Imām takes place in 874.

The succession of 'Alī's descendents to the Imāmate ended in 874, when the Twelfth Imām – ninth descendent of 'Alī's second son, Ḥussein – disappeared in Samarra. The Shī'a community,²³ which had looked to the family of 'Alī for leadership for some two centuries, was left with a succession of four deputies of the Twelfth Imām, each of whom delivered messages from the Imām and collected taxes on his behalf,

²⁰ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 11.

²¹ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 11.

²² Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 116.

²³ The literal meaning of the word Shī'a is "partisan" or "supporter." Crone that the followers of Mu'āwiyah, the founder of the Umayyad Dynasty, were referred to as "Shī'at Mu'āwiyah," while the supporters of 'Alī were called "Shī'at 'Alī." Over time, the term "Shī'at 'Alī" was shortened to simply "Shī'a," which refers to those who supported the claims of 'Alī and his descendents to the caliphate. More specifically, "Twelver Shī'a" and "Imāmī Shī'a" refer to those who looked for leadership to the twelve imāms who descended directly from 'Alī. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 20.

during the period known as the Lesser Occultation of the Twelfth Imām. The period beginning in 329/939, upon the death of the last of these four deputies, became known as the Greater Occultation. The Greater Occultation necessitated a reexamination of doctrine, especially in practical matters such as the collection of the *khums* tax due to the Imām, and in addressing larger questions such as who would lead the Twelver Shī'a community.

Although Modarressi describes the period between the Minor and Major Occultations (260/874-329/939) as "undoubtedly the most difficult and critical period in the history of Imamite Shī'ism,"²⁴ his discussion of other succession crises and divisions within the Shī'a community prior to the Minor Occultation implies that the crisis of the Twelfth Imām's occultation was not without precedent. Modarressi argues that the concept of occultation was present within Islam from the time of Muḥammad's death, writing that a companion of Muḥammad's "asserted that he did not die but disappeared from his people and would return."²⁵ Modarressi is undoubtedly correct that the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām was hardly the first time that the Shī'a community had encountered the idea of occultation or the challenge of reassuring its adherents. However, despite being fairly accustomed to crisis and uncertainty, the aftershocks of the Twelfth Imām's occultation lasted far beyond 329/939, and this dissertation argues

²⁴ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, vii.

²⁵ Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, 19.

that medieval scholarship's preoccupation with the Imām long past his disappearance is proof of his continued importance.

Building her argument on Modarressi's work, Crone writes that the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām in 939 did not cause a rupture in the Imāmī Shī'a community; rather, it merely "formalized" the authority of the religious scholars, which had been increasing since the death of Mūsa al-Kāẓim in 799.²⁶ However, if that were entirely the case, why do the exegetes whose work will be examined here continue to name the absent Imām as their authority, long after the imām's disappearance? Even after his disappearance, the Imām clearly continued to play a critical role in the minds of his followers and in the writings of the scholars. Although Crone writes that, after the Occultation, the Imāmī Shī'a "made themselves wholly innocuous in political terms: they no longer had an imām to enthrone, and no political action could be presented as ordered by him,"²⁷ Imāmī scholars continued to write about politics. The absent Imām played a role in their thinking, and often the scholars themselves participated in the political structures of their time.

'Abbāsīd Rule and its Implications for Shī'a Communities

²⁶ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 119.

²⁷ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 118-9.

The second strand of this narrative begins with the ‘Abbāsīd revolution in 750, which ended the pre-existing Umayyad order of governance. The nature of ‘Abbāsīd rule changed dramatically during the centuries between the overthrow of the Umayyads and the fall of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate in 1258 – from tensions and, at times, reconciliation with ‘Alid supporters, to ‘Abbāsīd relations with the Buyids and Seljuqs. The ‘Abbāsīd caliphs had ruled Baghdad since the caliph Mansur had founded the city in 762, but in 836 Samarra became the new ‘Abbāsīd capital. The ‘Abbāsīds, who took power in 750 on a platform of support for the family of Muḥammad, soon broke with their supporters.

Hilary Kilpatrick paints a grim portrait of early ‘Abbāsīd rule, writing that “the ‘Abbāsīd revolution not only sharpened ideological differences, but it brought the establishment of a centralized government which sought to eliminate ideological opponents, and the first ‘Abbāsīds, with their campaigns against supporters of the Umayyads, known sympathizers with the ‘Alids, and those who were described as *zanādiqa*, call to mind modern governments applying a ruthless censorship.”²⁸ The famous author Ibn al-Muqaffa’ is an early and prominent example of ‘Abbāsīd zeal against perceived enemies, and Kilpatrick describes his death as “one of the best-known examples of censorship of prose.”²⁹

²⁸ Hilary Kilpatrick, “The Medieval Arab Poet and the Limits of Freedom,” *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1979): 99-100.

²⁹ Kilpatrick, “The Medieval Arab Poet and the Limits of Freedom,” 100.

By the time of the caliph Mutawakkil (r. 847-861),³⁰ the 'Abbāsids had shed all vestiges of their earlier leanings towards the family of 'Alī, and the caliphate became a Sunnī orthodox institution. When the 'Abbāsids returned to Baghdad in 892, they were significantly weakened, and the true holders of power had become their Turkish generals who maintained the 'Abbāsīd caliphate in a ceremonial role, perhaps most significant for its spiritual authority. Fortunately for the Shī'a community in Baghdad, the Greater Occultation of the Twelfth Imām in 939/329 occurred just as the Buyid princes of Dailam were moving through Iran and taking the capitals of Rayy and Shiraz. In 945, Mu'izz al-Dawla swept into Iraq and set himself up as the temporal ruler Baghdad. Like the Turkish generals, the Buyid dynasty that arrived in Baghdad in 945 quickly took over the mundane responsibilities of governance, while the 'Abbāsīd caliphs remained the focus of religious loyalty for many Sunnī subjects of the empire.

The relationship between the Buyid and 'Abbāsīd dynasties deserves mention, as it has been treated in numerous works and is the subject of much scholarly interest. Guy Le Strange notes that the Buyid palaces were known by contemporary chroniclers as the *Dār al-Mamlakat* (the Palace of the Government), and that the place where the caliph "reigned, but no longer governed" was called the *Dār al-Khilāfat* (Palace of the

³⁰ Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2004), xvii.

Caliphate).³¹ This arrangement appears to have been advantageous for all parties involved; the Buyids deliberately refused to tamper with the institution of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate, preferring instead to use the caliphate to legitimate their authority with their Sunnī subjects.

Roy Mottahedeh explains that the "'Abbāsīds and their usurpers agreed to cover each other's loss with the fiction that the caliph had kept full theoretical sovereignty over the province while granting actual control to the usurper. In token of this sovereignty, the actual ruler (often called an emīr or 'commander') had the name of the reigning 'Abbāsīd caliph mentioned in the Friday congregational prayer and on the coinage"³² and depended on the receipt of titles from the Sunnī 'Abbāsīds in order to appear legitimate to their Sunnī subjects. John J. Donohue addresses Baghdad under Buyid rule in his work, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334H./945 to 403H./1012*. Donohue primarily focuses on the relationships between the 'Abbāsīd caliphs, who were Sunnī by the time of the Buyid takeover, and the Buyid princes. As Roy Mottahedeh explains in *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, Donohue also discusses the mutual support

³¹ Guy Le Strange, *Baghdad During the Abbasid Caliphate from Contemporary Arabic and Persian Sources*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1943), 233.

³² Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 18.

between the 'Abbāsids and Buyids, writing that "the caliph now became a state functionary."³³

The Buyids were "in some vague sense Shi'is,"³⁴ and the position of Shī'a subjects within the realm and in political life changed as a result of Buyid ascendancy, providing increased political safety for the Twelver Shī'a community at the time of the disappearance of the Twelfth Imām and the religious upheaval caused by his failure to return. The Buyids ushered in an era of government leniency towards the Twelver Shī'a, and – along with a number of other factors – mitigated the crisis of the Occultation. Most the *tafsīr* addressed in this dissertation was written under the Buyids, who often patronized Twelver intellectuals.³⁵ Under the Buyids, Shī'a subjects attained high political office, and one example of this phenomenon – al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and his relatives – will be discussed here at greater length.

This chapter argues that the shift from 'Abbāsīd temporal authority to the Buyid takeover of Baghdad saw an improvement in the status of Twelver Shī'a intellectuals, even though they probably never achieved a full sense of security. Meir Bar Asher

³³ John J. Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334H./945 to 403H.1012: Shaping Institutions for the Future*, (Boston: Brill, 2003), 17.

³⁴ Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 28.

³⁵ Heinz Halm, *Shī'ism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 50.

names the 'Abbāsīd caliphs as "contemporary enemies of the Shī'a,"³⁶ which is most likely an accurate reflection of how Shī'a scholars treated the 'Abbāsīds in their religious texts; however, this characterization does not take into account the complex relationship between the Shī'a community and the 'Abbāsīds – as well as the Buyids and Seljuqs – over the course over several centuries.

In 1055, the Seljuq Turks took Baghdad over from the faltering Buyids; the Seljuqs viewed themselves as champions of Sunnī orthodoxy, and during this era many of the Shī'a officials who had attained political power under the Buyids initially suffered a backlash from the new Sunnī rulers and their administrators. Donohue writes that historians have "tended to emphasize the Sunnite-Seljuk conquest of Iraq as the key factor in lifting up the [caliphate] to regain some of its past prestige after the degradation it had suffered from the Shiite Buwayhids."³⁷ However, both Donohue and George Makdisi, in his article "The Topography of Eleventh Century Baghdad: Materials and Notes," caution strongly against this point of view. Donohue writes that the alliance between the Seljuqs and the 'Abbāsīds "was one of convenience rather than of ideology,"³⁸ while Makdisi notes the "clash of interests between Caliph and Sultan" in the

³⁶ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 120.

³⁷ Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334H./945 to 403H.1012*, 262-3.

³⁸ Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334H./945 to 403H.1012*, 269.

Seljuq era.³⁹ An understanding of the Seljuqs as pragmatic, rather than ideological, will help to inform this study.

Earlier historiography concerning this period has tended to accept the argument that the arrival of the Seljuqs was disastrous for the Twelvers, especially following the tolerant decades under the Buyids. However, Heinz Halm notes that, eventually, “after the establishment of the empire... a Shī’ite from Qumm became Finance Minister (*mustawfī*), and from then on Shī’ite viziers – in particular from Qumm, Āva and Kāshān - were no longer a rarity. Two out of the six viziers of Sultan Sanjar (511-52/1118-57) were Shī’ites.”⁴⁰ This dissertation has argued that the Buyids were neither as loved by their Twelver subjects, nor the Seljuqs as despised, as has been commonly thought.

Although the Seljuqs seem to have reached eventual accommodations with their Twelver subjects, Daftary writes that “the revolt of the Persian Ismā’īlīs led by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ against the Saljūq Turks, the new overlords of the ‘Abbāsids, called forth another prolonged Sunnī reaction against the Ismā’īlīs in general and the Nizārī Ismā’īlīs in particular. A new literary campaign, accompanied by military attacks on the Nizārī strongholds in Persia, was initiated by Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), the Saljūq vizier and

³⁹ George Makdisi, "The Topography of Eleventh Century Baghdad: Materials and Notes," *Arabica*, T. 6, Fasc. 3, (Sept., 1959): 298.

⁴⁰ Halm, *Shī’ism*, 57-8.

virtual master of their dominions for more than two decades, with the full endorsement of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph and the Saljūq sultan.”⁴¹

Not all of Seljuq attempts to silence their opponents were directed only at various Shī’a groups. The Seljuqs were Hanafī Sunnīs and carried out policies in Khurasan that targeted the community Ash‘arī Sunnīs, who were “largely Shāfi‘ī in affiliation.”⁴² In 445/1053, the Seljuq sultan Tughril Beg “proclaimed that the Shī’a and Ash‘arī were to be cursed from the pulpits of Khurasan,” and Martin Nguyen notes that the public cursing of these groups may have been instituted by the Seljuqs in Khurasan as early as 440/1048.⁴³

Seljuq actions – especially taken by the vizier Kunderī – against the Ash‘arīs of Nishapur directly affected the scholar al-Qushayrī, who was arrested in 445/1053.⁴⁴ After his release, al-Qushayrī went to Baghdad, and may have continued his journey and made the *ḥajj*.⁴⁵ Al-Qushayrī returned to Nishapur at the end of his life, and Nguyen writes that after Tughril Beg’s death in 455/1063 and the ascent of Niẓām al-Mulk as the new sultan’s vizier, “the persecution was finally brought to an official end. Under the

⁴¹ Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.

⁴² Martin Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar: Abū’l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī and the Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012), 41.

⁴³ Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar*, 41.

⁴⁴ Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar*, 41.

⁴⁵ Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar*, 43.

patronage and guidance of Niẓām al-Mulk, Qushayrī was able to live in ease and comfort for the rest of his days in Nishapur.”⁴⁶ In more evidence of his tolerance towards the Ash‘arīs, Niẓām al-Mulk “appointed the foremost Shāfi‘ī Ash‘arī of Nishapur, Imām al-Haramayn al-Juwayni, as director and professor of law” of the first Niẓamiyya that he built in Nishapur around 1060.⁴⁷

Twelver Exegetes

This dissertation traces developments in early Twelver Shī‘a political theory, by comparing the *tafsīr* of Twelver exegetes in the ninth through eleventh centuries. In “A Study of Imāmī Shī‘ī Tafsīr,” Mahmoud Ayoub writes that “the first generation of Shī‘ī commentators were disciples of the Imāms. Men like Zurāra ibn A‘yun, Muḥammad ibn Muslim, and others close to the disciples of the fifth and sixth Imāms were among the first authorities in the Shī‘ī community on *tafsīr* and other religious sciences.”⁴⁸ However, none of their work has survived, except for what has “been preserved in the works of the second generation of commentators. Most important among these are Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Furāt al-Kūfī, Abū’l-Naḍr Muḥammad ibn Mas‘ūd al-‘Ayyāshī al-Samarqandī, Abū’l-

⁴⁶ Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar*, 45.

⁴⁷ Margaret Malamud, “The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan,” *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (1994): 48.

⁴⁸ Mahmoud Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmī Shī‘ī Tafsīr,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’an*, ed. Andrew Rippin, 177-98 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 184.

Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, and Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nu‘mānī.”⁴⁹ This dissertation treats the work of Furāt ibn Furāt, al-‘Ayyāshī, and ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī as the first wave of Shī‘ī commentary while also seeking to differentiate between the three of them.

Meir Bar-Asher provides an excellent treatment of the work of Furāt ibn Furāt, al-‘Ayyāshī, and ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī in his book *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*. However, Shahab Ahmed accurately critiques Bar-Asher’s work, writing that “having made the case that the four *tafsīrs*⁵⁰ under study are representative of a single loosely defined ‘school,’ Bar-Asher then proceeds to use them throughout the book in a somewhat undifferentiated manner with the result that one does not really get a sense of these commentaries as distinct works produced by individual authors.”⁵¹ This dissertation will problematize the development of a Twelver Shī‘a “school” in Baghdad, and it will provide further differentiation between the exegetes in Bar-Asher’s work, as well as between the later commentators.

Despite being grouped with the early Twelver exegetes, al-‘Ayyāshī is perhaps an outlier, who seems to have remained on the margins of the Twelver orthodox establishment. In *Dharī‘ah ila taṣānīf al-Shī‘ah*, the Āghā Buzurg (1875-1970) devotes a

⁴⁹ Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān,” 184.

⁵⁰ The fourth of these, the *tafsīr* of Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nu‘mānī, is untreated in this project, as I have not located it.

⁵¹ Shahab Ahmed, “Review of *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shiism*,” in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 123, No. 1 (Jan.-Mar., 2003): 184.

half page to his discussion of al-‘Ayyāshī’s *tafsīr*, noting that he wrote more than one hundred books in the subjects of “*ḥadīth*, biographical literature (*al-rijāl*), exegesis (*al-tafsīr*), astronomy (*al-nujūm*),⁵² and others.”⁵³ The rest of this entry discusses the libraries in which manuscripts of al-‘Ayyāshī’s *tafsīr* are located. Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) also devotes an entry to al-‘Ayyāshī in his biographical work, *Kitāb ma‘ālim al-‘ulamā’*, which incorporates al-Ṭūsī’s *Fihrist*. Ibn Shahrāshūb writes that al-‘Ayyāshī’s books numbered more than two hundred in many different subjects, and he lists *tafsīr* as the first of these categories.⁵⁴

Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Najāshī (982-1058) provides an entry for al-‘Ayyāshī in his *Kitāb al-rijāl*, which bears strong similarities to the later entry in ibn Shahrāshūb’s work, although it does not replicate it. As in ibn Shahrāshūb’s text, al-Najāshī lists *tafsīr* as the first genre to which al-‘Ayyāshī contributed.⁵⁵ Al-Najāshī notes that al-‘Ayyāshī wrote a book on the “division of *ghanīma* and *fay*,”⁵⁶ whereas ibn Shahrāshūb mentions al-

⁵² I have translated “*al-nujūm*” as “astronomy,” rather than “astrology” (“*tanjīm*”) and rather than “herbage,” which Hans Wehr gives as a possible definition of “*al-nujūm*.”

⁵³ Muḥammad Muḥsin Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, *Dharī‘ah ila taṣānīf al-Shī‘ah*, Vol. 3 (Najaf: Maṭba‘at al-Gharrā, 1936), 295.

⁵⁴ Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Shahrāshūb, *Kitāb ma‘ālim al-‘ulamā’ fī fihrist kutub al-Shī‘ah wa-asmā’ al-muṣannifīn minhum, qadīman wa-ḥadīthan* (Ṭīhrān: Maṭba‘at Fardīn, 1934/5), 88.

⁵⁵ Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Najāshī, *Kitāb al-rijāl l’ alladhī ṣannafahu Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn al-‘Abbās al-Najāshī* (Ṭīhrān: Markaz Nashr Kitāb, 195[?]), 271.

⁵⁶ al-Najāshī, *Kitāb al-rijāl*, 271.

‘Ayyāshī’s book on *khums*.⁵⁷ Additionally, al-Najāshī also writes that al-‘Ayyāshī wrote a book on the *jizya* and *kharāj* taxes.⁵⁸

Turning to more sectarian topics, al-Najāshī mentions al-‘Ayyāshī’s books on “[God’s] oneness (*tawḥīd*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*),” “the Occultation (*ghayba*),” “proofs of the Imamate (*dilā’il al-ā’imah*),” and a book on “the obligation of obeying the scholars (*farḍ ṭā’ah al-‘ulamā’*).”⁵⁹ Of that list, Ibn Shahrāshūb mentions only the “proofs of the Imamate.”⁶⁰ Interestingly, both biographers note that al-‘Ayyāshī wrote biographies (*sīra*) of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and Mu‘āwīyya.⁶¹

The commentary of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d.413/1020) represents a change from earlier generations of commentary, chiefly because it moves away from dependence on *ḥadīth* and towards argumentation based on reason. Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd studied with Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, who had been the student of ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī,⁶² and al-Mufīd is thus the intellectual heir of the first wave of Shī’a exegetes. This dissertation argues that al-Mufīd and his students constitute a “Baghdad School” of Shī’a

⁵⁷ Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Kitāb ma’ālim al-‘ulamā’*, 89.

⁵⁸ al-Najāshī, *Kitāb al-rijāl*, 272.

⁵⁹ al-Najāshī, *Kitāb al-rijāl*, 272.

⁶⁰ Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Kitāb ma’ālim al-‘ulamā’*, 89.

⁶¹ Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Kitāb ma’ālim al-‘ulamā’*, 89, and al-Najāshī, *Kitāb al-rijāl*, 272.

⁶² Halm, *Shī’ism*, 49.

commentators, although the members of this school naturally have their differences as well.⁶³

Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd taught al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d.436/1044) whose work, especially his *Treatise on the Legality of Working for the Government*,⁶⁴ offers something of a counterpoint to other contemporary Shī'a opinions on cooperation with an illegitimate government. In addition to teaching al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd also taught Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥassan al-Ṭūsī (d.460/1067), whose works include *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* and *al-Nihāyah fī mojarraḍ (sic) al-fiqh wa al-fatāwā*. Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī is the scholar who perhaps best exemplifies orthodox Twelver Shī'ism, as he selected the first two canonical *ḥadīth* collections of Shī'a Islam, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh* and *al-Kāfī*, and wrote the remaining two: *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*.⁶⁵

Abdulaziz Sachedina writes that al-Ṭūsī's work is characterized by a "delicate compromise" between reliance on *ḥadīth* and rational thought.⁶⁶ Additionally, Wilferd Madelung mentions the acceptance of al-Ṭūsī's views on working "on behalf of the unjust

⁶³ Ayoub refers to al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and his students as the "third generation of Shī'ī commentators," and argues that this generation "extended over a very long period, well into the sixteenth century AD" and included Mullā Ṣadrā al-Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640), Hāshim al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1695), 'Alī al-Ḥuwayzī (d. 1112/1700), and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1191/1777), Ayoub, "The Speaking Qur'ān and the Silent Qur'ān," 185.

⁶⁴ Interestingly, this treatise was commissioned by the Buyid court.

⁶⁵ Halm, *Shī'ism*, 52.

⁶⁶ Abdulaziz Sachedina, "A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam," *Studia Islamica*, No. 48, (1978): 116.

ruler" by later scholars, such as the Muḥaqqiq Jaʿfar bin al-Ḥasan al-Ḥillī (d.676/1277),⁶⁷ which surely contributed to al-Ṭūsī's work forming a cornerstone of Shī'a intellectual heritage. Due to al-Ṭūsī's centrality in the Twelver Shī'a intellectual tradition, the first chapter of this dissertation will explore al-Ṭūsī's introduction to his work, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*.

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's life spanned the end of the Buyid period and the Seljuq takeover of Baghdad in 1055, which caused him to move to al-Najaf in 448/1056-7.⁶⁸ Al-Ṭūsī taught 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Muqri' al-Rāzī (alive in 503/1109-10), who taught Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), whose commentary brings this study out of Baghdad and well into the Seljuq era, while providing continuity with the Baghdad school of Twelver thought that flourished during Buyid reign. Robert Gleave highlights the challenges of determining whether al-Ṭūsī's intellectual heirs challenged his views in their writings, or if the century and a half following the establishment of the Ḥawza in al-Najaf should be "viewed as a period of (at worst) stagnation and (at best)

⁶⁷ Wilferd Madelung, "A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā on the Legality of Working for the Government," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (1980): 31.

⁶⁸ These events and dates were recorded by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). Robert Gleave, "Shī'i Jurisprudence During the Seljuq Period: Rebellion and Public Order in an Illegitimate State," in *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture*, eds. Christian Lange and Songul Mecit, 205-27, (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 206.

unoriginality amongst the Shi'i intelligentsia generally, and the jurists (*fuqahā*) in particular.”⁶⁹

Famously, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā – an exegete whose work is discussed at length in this dissertation – and his brother, al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī (who compiled *Nahj al-balāgha*), were both descendants of the Seventh Imām.⁷⁰ Their father, Abū Aḥmad al-Mūsawī, was “named in 394/1004 by Bahā‘ al-Dawla is emir of the pilgrimage, presider over the courts of grievance (*mazālim*), head (*naqīb*) of the Imamites [*sic*], and grand magistrate.”⁷¹ When the elder al-Mūsawī died, al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī took his place as the *naqīb* in the Buyid court.⁷² Both brothers were important members of the Buyid court, and they also participated in the court of the ‘Abbāsīd caliph – especially at times when the Buyid emīr and ‘Abbāsīd caliph collaborated together.⁷³ The origins of the *naqīb* position are murky, but by the era of the Mūsawī brothers, it appears as though the title indicated a responsibility for keeping genealogical records of the nobility (*ashrāf*), or descendents of the Banū Hāshim, “to enter births and deaths... and to examine the validity of alleged

⁶⁹ Gleave, “Shi'i Jurisprudence During the Seljuq Period,” 206.

⁷⁰ Halm, *Shī'ism*, 50.

⁷¹ Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 27.

⁷² Halm, *Shī'ism*, 50.

⁷³ Halm, *Shī'ism*, 50.

'Alid genealogies."⁷⁴ The holder of the office was selected by the 'Abbāsīd ruler, and although it does not seem to have been a hereditary position, although the *naqīb* would presumably always have been a member of the nobility.⁷⁵

Both al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā were involved in an episode that modern scholar Farhad Daftary calls the "anti-Fāṭimid manifesto of Baghdad, issued in 402/1011, by a number of 'Alids and jurists," and sponsored by the caliph al-Qādir.⁷⁶ In the issuing of this manifesto, the brothers "acted as intermediaries between the 'Abbāsīds and the Buyids," and the 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Qādir "commanded them to declare in a written statement that al-Ḥākim and his predecessors were imposters with no genuine Fāṭimid 'Alid ancestry."⁷⁷

The fourteenth century historian Ibn Khaldūn also notes the witnessing of the statement by the two brothers (naming them first in his list of "prominent men" involved with the incident), and Ibn Khaldūn also notes other religious scholars and one Shī'a

⁷⁴ William A. Graham, "Sharīf." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2014. [Reference](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/sharif-COM_1041). Harvard University. 08 February 2014 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/sharif-COM_1041>

⁷⁵ Graham, "Sharīf." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

⁷⁶ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 101.

⁷⁷ Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 185.

jurist (Abū ‘Abdallāh b. al-Nu‘mān) who were involved as well.⁷⁸ Daftary argues that this document had the longest lasting influence on how contemporaries and later historians viewed Fāṭimid genealogical claims, and he discusses the “official anti-Isma‘īlī propaganda campaign,” that the ‘Abbāsids took on in response to the Fāṭimid dynasty in Egypt, part of which rested on “denying the ‘Alid genealogy of [Isma‘īlī] imams.”⁷⁹ In addition to the problematic sourcing caused by “non-‘Alid pedigrees of the Fāṭimid dynasty,” the Fāṭimid caliphs themselves refused “to publish any official genealogy.”⁸⁰

By and large, the relationship between the Buyids and the Twelver intellectuals was one of mutual support. In his analysis of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā’s *Risālah*, Abdulaziz Sachedina argues that “the use of *kalam* and the open vindication of the Imamate and the *ghaybah* of the Hidden Imam was to some extent the result of the favourable relationship of the Imamite [*sic*] theologians like al-Mufīd and al-Murtaḍā with the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs and the Buyid amirs. The Buyids had, at least politically, preferred the Imamite Shiism, in particular, that part of the doctrinal structure of the *ghaybah* which accepted the rule of ‘oppressor’ (the caliph, according to the Imamites), without making the twelfth Imam responsible for his removal and without requiring the *ummah* to pay

⁷⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, Second Edition, Volume I. Trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 45-6.

⁷⁹ Daftary, *The Isma‘īlīs*, 7.

⁸⁰ Daftary, *The Isma‘īlīs*, 101. Daftary adds that “‘Abd Allāh al-Mahdī, the only [Fatimid caliph] who did make such an attempt, simply added to the confusion.”

allegiance to him as an Imam until his reappearance.”⁸¹ Here we see a compatibility between the absence of the true religious authority (the Imām) and the acceptance of the temporal rule of the Buyids and ‘Abbāsids, which perhaps provides an explanation for the promulgation of the politically uncontroversial *ghayba* doctrine while also explaining why the Occultation goes unmentioned in the Qur’ānic commentaries we have examined thus far, especially Q 4:59 and Q 8:41.

Jane Dammen McAuliffe describes al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī as the intellectual successor to al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā within the Shī’a community of Baghdad. McAuliffe writes that “so great was [al-Ṭūsī’s] renown that the caliph al-Qā’im (422/1031-467/1075) appointed him to the chair of theology (*kalām*), an honor bestowed only on a scholar who had no equal.”⁸² However, McAuliffe cautions that:

Al-Ṭūsī’s relations with this caliph were not always so pleasant. On one occasion, the exegete was summoned before the caliph al-Qā’im to answer charges that he had cursed some of the Companions, especially the first three caliphs. The evidence brought in support of this accusation was a prayer for the day of ‘Ashūrā’ from al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-miṣbāḥ* which asks God to curse ‘the first, second, third, fourth... and Yazīd as a fifth.’ Called upon by the caliph to defend himself, al-Ṭūsī offered an inventive (if somewhat specious) response and thereby exonerated himself. According to al-Shushtarī, the caliph went so far as to award al-Ṭūsī a prize and to punish his slanderers.⁸³

⁸¹ Sachedina, "A Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam," 115.

⁸² Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 47.

⁸³ McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 47.

This anecdote illustrates the marginal space occupied at times by the Twelver Shī'a community and its leaders, even though the Buyid era was, for the most part, a period of tolerance. Although this was a time of relative security for the Twelver community, a hint of precariousness was perhaps always present.

For a deeper look into the lives and contexts of the Twelver authors whose works are examined in this dissertation, I have consulted the literature of biographical dictionaries (*ṭabaqāt*). While some of these texts date from the medieval period, perhaps one of the most important works in this genre is *Dharī'ah ila taṣānīf al-Shī'ah*, written by Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī. In this encyclopedic work, the Āghā Buzurg compiles information from centuries of biographical dictionaries, providing an archaeology of texts written by and about Shī'a scholars.

The Āghā Buzurg devotes a full entry to al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's work of Qur'ānic commentary, *al-Tibyān*. He quotes a number of sources, writing that the *Tibyān* is described in the Fihrist (d. 385/995, or possibly d. 388/998)⁸⁴ as "without equal,"⁸⁵ and adds that al-Najāshī clarified that the Fihrist was referring to "*Kitāb al-tibyān*."⁸⁶ The Āghā

⁸⁴ Fück, J.W.. "Ibn al-Nadīm." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2014. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-al-nadim-SIM_3317

⁸⁵ Literally, "there were no other works like it."

⁸⁶ Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, *Dharī'ah ila taṣānīf al-Shī'ah*, 328.

Buzurg quotes the Ayatallah Baḥr al-‘Ulūm, who wrote in his *Fawā'id al-rijālīya* that the *Tibyān* was “the first *tafsīr* that combines in it the types of sciences of the Qur’ān.”⁸⁷

Citing “our companions,” i.e., other Twelver scholars, the Āghā Buzurg writes that many have noted the arts of the study of the Qur’ān – namely “recitation (*al-qirā’at*), meanings (*al-ma’ānī*), end vocalization of words (*al-‘irāb*), and words that are ambiguous (*al-kalām ‘ala al-mutashābih*), and the answers concerning the invectives of the non-believers in it (*al-jawāb ‘an maṭā’in al-mulḥidīn fīhī*).”⁸⁸ This list echoes several important terms that al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī addresses in his introduction to his *tafsīr*, as al-Ṭūsī especially emphasizes recitation,⁸⁹ vocalization,⁹⁰ and ambiguous passages,⁹¹ although al-Ṭūsī does not mention the more sectarian response to apostasy that the Āghā Buzurg includes. The Āghā Buzurg concludes his entry for al-Ṭūsī’s *Tibyān* with more than two pages that discuss the various libraries in which manuscripts of the text are located.⁹²

This dissertation will argue that al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī was perhaps the most central figure in the “Baghdad school” of Twelver Shī’a scholarship of the tenth and eleventh

⁸⁷ Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, *Dharī’ah ila taṣānīf al-Shī’ah*, 328.

⁸⁸ Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, *Dharī’ah ila taṣānīf al-Shī’ah*, 328.

⁸⁹ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān / ta’līf Abī Ja’far Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, qaddama lahu Aghā Buzurk al-Ṭīhrānī*, Vol. 1 (al-Najaf: al-Maṭba’ah al-‘Ilmīyah, 1957-63), 8.

⁹⁰ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 8.

⁹¹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 9.

⁹² Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, *Dharī’ah ila taṣānīf al-Shī’ah*, 329-331.

centuries. This argument takes into account al-Ṭūsī's role in selecting and compiling the fourth books of Twelver *ḥadīth*, and – more importantly for our purposes – al-Ṭūsī set the precedent for the ways in which Twelver *tafsīr* would relate to *ḥadīth* and other Islamic sciences.

Table I: Early Shī'a Exegetes: ninth through twelfth centuries

<p>Furāt Ibn Furāt al-Kūfī (third/late ninth century)⁹³ <i>Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī</i></p>	<p>ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (fourth/tenth century) <i>Tafsīr al-Qummī</i></p>
Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 381/991) <i>Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh</i>	Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) <i>al-Kāfī</i>
Al-Shaykh al-Mūfīd (d.413/1020) <i>Al Amālī</i> <i>Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-majīd al-mustakhraj min turāth al-Shaykh al-Mufīd</i>	Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nuʿmānī ⁹⁴ (d. 360/971)
Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥassan al-Ṭūsī (d.460/1067) <i>Tahdhīb al-aḥkām; al-Istibṣār</i> <i>al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān</i>	Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d.436/1044) "Treatise on the Legality of Working for the Government" <i>Tafsīr al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā</i>
ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Muqrīʾ al-Rāzī (alive in 503/1109-10)	
Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154) <i>Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān</i>	

⁹³ Ayoub, "The Speaking Qurʾān and the Silent Qurʾān," 184. More specifically, Rippin cites 310/922 as the date of his death, in Rippin, A. "Tafsīr (a.)." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](#). Harvard University. 29 November 2011

⁹⁴ Ayoub, "The Speaking Qurʾān and the Silent Qurʾān," 185.

Conclusions

This chapter has taken a brief look at the lives and different roles played by some of the most prominent Twelver Shī'a exegetes in medieval Baghdad, and at the political context in which they lived. Bar Asher argues that the Twelver Shī'a feared 'Abbāsīd rule enough to code their written language in an effort to escape notice from the political authorities, writing that "religious and ideological minorities may find themselves in danger as a result of overt and careless expression of ideas unpalatable to the ruling majority. It would appear that within Imāmī Shī'ism the use of secret language derives mainly from fear of the ruling majority."⁹⁵

Bar Asher explains that "Imāmī scholars needed to walk a fine line: on the one hand, they tried not to sacrifice expression of their real intentions whenever possible; on the other hand, they had to make sure that the expression of such ideas did not arouse the wrath of their Sunnī opponents. This is one of the clearest manifestations of the doctrine of *taqiyya*."⁹⁶ What we will see in these chapters is a reluctance to sacrifice that "expression of their real intentions" within the genre of *tafsīr*, while shorter treatises or material commissioned by the temporal authorities seems devoid of that expression.

⁹⁵ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 113.

⁹⁶ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 114.

CHAPTER TWO

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's Introduction to his *Tafsīr*: An Exegete's Priorities and Commitments

Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī and Exegesis

Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, later known as al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, was born in Ṭūs in 385/995, which was, at the time, administered by the Sāmānids.⁹⁷ Al-Ṭūsī moved to Buyid-ruled Baghdad around 408/1017, where he studied with al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d.413/1022) and then with al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d.436/1044).⁹⁸ Jane Dammen McAuliffe writes that “upon the death of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, al-Ṭūsī assumed the leading intellectual position in the Baghdād Shīʿī community” but only “enjoyed the prestige of his honors for little more than ten years.”⁹⁹ When the Seljuqs took Baghdad from the Buyids in 447/1055, al-Ṭūsī fled to Najaf, where he lived until his death in 460/1067. Al-Ṭūsī's role in the establishment of the Twelver Shīʿa orthodox canon has been discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, and this chapter will situate al-Ṭūsī's *tafsīr* within the context of contemporary exegesis.

Bruce Fudge summarizes the trends in early and classical exegesis, writing that early exegetical works focused on either lexical or contextual concerns, which,

⁹⁷ McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, 45.

⁹⁸ McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, 45-6.

⁹⁹ McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, 47.

respectively, explained “strange or unusual words” and “the circumstances of a particular portion of revelation.”¹⁰⁰ Fudge writes that “by the fourth/tenth century, *tafsīr* works contained on the one hand a variable quantity of transmitted reports from the early authorities. On the other hand, they also contained material much more recent in origin, whether discussions derived from the developing Islamic sciences (philological matters, theological debates, variant readings), or judgment on and glossing of earlier interpretations.”¹⁰¹ The second and third chapters of this dissertation will illustrate the reliance on *ḥadīth* of most of the Twelver exegesis that predate al-Ṭūsī.

Al-Ṭūsī’s concern with what Fudge calls the more recent material is strongly evident in the body of his *tafsīr* as well as in his introduction. Al-Ṭūsī’s introduction to his *Tibyān* has been called “the first great rationalist Imāmī commentary,”¹⁰² and McAuliffe notes that “al-Ṭūsī’s biographers frequently refer to this *tafsīr* as the first that incorporated all the sciences of the Qur’ān.”¹⁰³ Al-Ṭūsī begins his introduction with a brief discussion of *ḥadīth*, addressing the question of how *ḥadīth* may be used to interpret the

¹⁰⁰ Bruce Fudge, *Qur’ānic Hermeneutics: Al-Ṭabrisī and the Craft of Commentary* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 6.

¹⁰¹ Fudge, *Qur’ānic Hermeneutics*, 9.

¹⁰² Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali. “al-Ṭūsī.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2013. [Reference](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-tusi-SIM_7653). Harvard University. 25 November 2013
<http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-tusi-SIM_7653>

¹⁰³ McAuliffe cites Ḥasan al-Ṣadr, Aghā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, and Ḥasan ‘Isā al-Ḥakīm. McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 49.

Qur'ān. Al-Ṭūsī references the concept of Muḥammad as the first exegete, citing a *ḥadīth* about 'Aisha in which she refers to Muḥammad as an interpreter of the Qur'ān.

Al-Ṭūsī devotes the bulk of his introduction to discussing various methods of interpreting the Qur'ān. He argues that the Qur'ān contains four categories of meanings within it, but he argues against the idea that there are seven different recitations (*qirā'at*) in the Qur'ān and that, instead, “the Qur'ān was revealed in one type, to one prophet.”¹⁰⁴ Al-Ṭūsī addresses the interrelated questions of clear (*muḥkam*) and ambiguous (*mutashābih*) passages in the Qur'ān and the concept of abrogation (*naskh*). Finally, al-Ṭūsī concludes with a discussion of the four different names of the Qur'ān (*al-qur'ān*, *al-furqān*, *al-kitāb*, and *al-dhikr*).

Karen Bauer writes that al-Ṭabarī believed that “knowledge of the meaning of the text, and not just its words, is necessary for all Muslims,” but she argues that “works of *tafsīr*... obey particular genre constraints, which affect their content: these include the citation of authorities, who often have differing opinions on the meaning of the verse, and lengthy grammatical explanations. These elements often read as scholarly discussions for specialists.”¹⁰⁵ Bauer argues that “the material in the introductions to works of *tafsīr*, sermons and works of exegesis... gives the strong impression that exegetes intended

¹⁰⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Bauer, “I Have Seen the People’s Antipathy to This Knowledge,” 293.

for their works of *tafsīr* to be read by different levels of scholar.”¹⁰⁶ Similarly to al-Ṭabarī, we shall see that al-Ṭūsī admonishes those who do not “reflect on [the Qur’ān’s] meanings,” and that he quotes Q 47:24¹⁰⁷ as part of this chastisement. However, as Bauer argues, it is unlikely that al-Ṭūsī intended these instructions for an audience beyond the exegetes.

Although Bauer does not focus on the particular example of Twelver Shī’a exegesis, her conclusions concerning the broad nature of *tafsīr* stand when applied to al-Ṭūsī’s introduction to his *tafsīr*, a seminal work in the scholarship of Twelver Shī’ism. As Bauer writes, medieval exegetes “did not intend for *tafsīr* works to appeal to a broad, popular, non-learned audience.”¹⁰⁸ Al-Ṭūsī’s introduction to his *tafsīr* illustrates this point in its neglect of topics – such as the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām – that might have lent it greater appeal to a larger audience. Although al-Ṭūsī never specifies the intended audience for his work, his choices of topics in his *tafsīr* indicate that he could have only imagined a specialized – and most likely Shī’a – audience for this text.

The doctrine of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām was still in the process of being established during al-Ṭūsī’s lifetime – and al-Ṭūsī himself was a key figure in the development of this doctrine. However, one of the more notable elements of al-Ṭūsī’s

¹⁰⁶ Bauer, “I Have Seen the People’s Antipathy to This Knowledge,” 294.

¹⁰⁷ “Then do they not reflect upon the Qur’ān, or are there locks upon [their] hearts?” (Q 47:24).

¹⁰⁸ Bauer, “I Have Seen the People’s Antipathy to This Knowledge,” 294.

tafsīr is his inattention to the *ghayba*, which we may call the “*ghayba* paradox.” In differentiating between contemporary Twelver scholarship that addresses the *ghayba* and exegesis that leaves it largely unmentioned, we may conclude that works dealing with the Occultation are pragmatic and instructional, while *tafsīr* is written to serve other purposes and other audiences. From the distinctions between exegesis and non-exegetical work, we learn that exegesis is a pietistic act, demanding commitment to religious truth rather than to more pragmatic concerns.

Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī's (d.460/1067) Introduction to his tafsīr

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī begins his introduction to his *tafsīr* with a discussion of the practitioners of the various branches of Islamic sciences, in order to situate the discipline of Qur'ānic commentary and the exegetes. Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī briefly mentions the “transmitted books of *ḥadīth*,” noting that the majority of his contemporaries compiled *ḥadīth* books. He then discusses *tafsīr*, noting that the first exegetes were the “*‘ulamā’* of the *umma*.” Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī then mentions al-Ṭabarī and “others like him,” before turning to a short critique of theologians (*mutakallimūn*) such as Abū ‘Alī al-Jubā‘ī, and the jurists (*fuqahā*), such as al-Balkhī, as well as Muḥammad ibn Baḥr Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī and ‘Alī ibn ‘Isa al-Rummānī.¹⁰⁹ The Shī'a *ḥadīth* movement of compilers like al-Kulaynī and Ibn Bābawayh was followed by an interest in writing Qur'ānic commentary,

¹⁰⁹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, 1.

and, al-Ṭūsī was instrumental in bridging the gap between the *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* movements. The discipline of jurisprudence built upon the disciplines of *ḥadīth* compilation and exegesis, and Halm notes that “it was the Baghdadis who produced the principles of jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*) henceforth used by the Imāmīs, and assigned reason (*‘aql*) a fundamental role.”¹¹⁰

Bruce Fudge provides a complete translation of this passage from al-Ṭūsī’s introduction:

I have found among those who have undertaken a commentary on the Qur’ān from the scholars of the *umma*, some who go on at length, giving all its significations and full comprehension of what has been said about it from its various angles, like al-Ṭabarī and others, and some who are too brief, mentioning its lexical rarities or the linguistic elements (*dhikr gharībi-hi wa-ma’ānī alfāẓi-hi*). Those in between follow a path suited to their [own] strengths, and they leave aside that of which they have no familiarity (*ma’rifa*). Al-Zajjāj and al-Farrā’ and those like them from among the grammarians poured their efforts into matters of inflection and declension. Mufaḍḍal b. Salama [d. 290/903] and others did much in lexicography and etymology. The theologians, like Abū ‘Alī al-Jubā’ī and others, turned their attention to matters of theological meanings (*mā yata’allaqu bil-ma’ānī l-kalāmiyya*). Among them [the theologians] are those who added to that discussion of other aspects of qur’ānic science; they insert that which is not related; such as expanding on the branches of jurisprudence and the disputes of the jurists, like al-Balkhī and others. The most upright of those who followed that path in a pleasing and moderate way were Muḥammad ibn Baḥr Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī and ‘Alī ibn ‘Isa al-Rummānī, and their two books are the most upright of what has been compiled in this genre (*fi hādhā l-ma’nā*), even though they have gone on at length, and presented much that is not necessary.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Halm, *Shī’ism*, 49.

¹¹¹ Fudge, *Qur’ānic Hermeneutics*, 122.

In this discussion, al-Ṭūsī draws clear lines between the scholars he admires and those whom he critiques. Al-Ṭūsī criticizes the theologians for addressing “that which is not related,” and specifically names al-Balkhī (d.319/931), a famous Mu‘tazilite.¹¹² In contrast, al-Ṭūsī praises al-Ṭabarī, including al-Ṭabarī in his cohort of Qur’ānic exegetes, despite their sectarian differences.

The heart of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī’s introduction commences under the title “*faṣl*,” and he begins with a discussion of his aims in his *tafsīr*, writing that “the intention of this book is the knowledge of [the Qur’ān’s] meanings and the varieties of its purposes.”¹¹³ Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī addresses the accusation made by some Shī‘a scholars that the language of the Qur’ān was tampered with in order to remove references to Shī‘a subjects. He writes, “And as for the discussion of additions or omissions to [the Qur’ān], it is not fitting [for this book, i.e., al-Ṭūsī’s *tafsīr*] either. That is because the addition (*al-zīyāda*) to the Qur’ān is refuted by consensus. And [as for] the omission (*al-nuqṣān*), the view of Muslims is ostensibly against it, and this [position] is the most appropriate and correct in our *madhhab*, and it is what al-Murtaḍā¹¹⁴ supported.”¹¹⁵ In contrast to al-Ṭūsī’s

¹¹² Nader, A.N.. “al-Balkhī.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2013. [Reference](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-balkhi-SIM_1156). Harvard University. 15 December 2013 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-balkhi-SIM_1156>

¹¹³ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 3.

¹¹⁴ Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), a contemporary of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī.

¹¹⁵ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 3.

view, Bar Asher quotes al-‘Ayyāshī, who wrote, “‘Had the book of God not been subject to additions and omissions (*lawlā annahu zīda fī kitāb llāh wa nuqīṣa minhu*), our righteousness would not have been hidden from any [person] of wisdom.’”¹¹⁶ Ayoub writes that al-Ṭūsī and other members of his scholarly circle “rejected many of the earlier (as well as later) Shī‘ī popular claims regarding the inauthenticity of the ‘Uthmanic recension of the Qur’ān in favor of a Shī‘ī recension,”¹¹⁷ and here we see that al-Ṭūsī is intent on moving away from what is perhaps a more conspiratorial line of thinking about the text of the Qur’ān.

Al-Ṭūsī quotes the *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn*,¹¹⁸ interpreting the second of the two “weighty things” to be the Prophet’s family: “Truly I am bequeathing to you the two weighty things, which, if you hold fast to them, you will not go astray: the Book of God, and my kindred the members of my household, and these two things will not be divided until they reach me at the *ḥawḍ* [i.e., the pool from which the righteous drink on Judgment Day].”¹¹⁹ The earlier exegete al-‘Ayyāshī gives a variant of this *ḥadīth*, in which

¹¹⁶ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 90.

¹¹⁷ Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān,” 185.

¹¹⁸ Bar-Asher notes that, “according to both Shī‘ī and Sunnī sources, Muḥammad related this *ḥadīth* to the believers during the sermon he delivered on his last pilgrimage to Mecca after its conquest (in the ninth year of the Hijra),” Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 93.

¹¹⁹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 3.

he writes: “I [Muḥammad] am your vanguard and you are destined to appear before me at the pool (of paradise [*wa antum wāridūna ‘alā l-ḥawḍ*]).”¹²⁰ In contrast to al-‘Ayyāshī, al-Ṭūsī takes the stress away from Muḥammad and places it back onto the two weighty things, emphasizing the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s family will not be separated from each other until Paradise. Stronger emphasis on the *ahl al-bayt* most likely reflects a renewed effort at Twelver polemic.

This variation of the *ḥadīth* is unsurprising for a Twelver exegete, although several other versions of the *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn* would have been in contemporary circulation. Perhaps the most common of the Sunnī variations of this *ḥadīth* lists the Qur’ān and the Sunna (*kitāb ‘ilāh wa sunnat nabiyyihī*) as the two “weighty things.”¹²¹ Another Sunnī version lists the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s family, but calls the Qur’ān “*al-thaqal al-akbar* – the more weighty object” and notes that the family is “*al-thaqal al-aṣghar* (the less weighty object).”¹²² Yet another Sunnī version only mentions the Qur’ān and fails to name the second of the two weighty things.¹²³

Al-Ṭūsī writes that this *ḥadīth* indicates that these “two things” – both the Qur’ān and the family of Muḥammad – are present in each epoch, since Muḥammad would not

¹²⁰ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 95-96.

¹²¹ Bar-Asher cites Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq’s *Kitāb sīrat rasūl ‘ilāh*, Bar Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 94.

¹²² Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 94.

¹²³ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 94.

have been permitted to have ordered adherence to something that could not have been obeyed.¹²⁴ Bar Asher takes this to mean that the Qur'ān “remains meaningless without the other, the Imāms, who invest it with life.”¹²⁵ However, al-Ṭūsī's emphasis in this passage appears to be on the continued existence of the Prophet's family (and, therefore, the Imāmate), which continues to be present in much the same way as the Qur'ān itself. Since al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, proof of the Occultation has rested, in part, on the principle of “the necessity of the existence of an Imām at every period of time.”¹²⁶ Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī elaborates on this concept, arguing that God's justice proves that the *ahl al-bayt* lives in each generation – just as the *ahl al-bayt* is proof of God's justice.

Al-Ṭūsī raises the question of the proper ways to interpret the Qur'ān, writing:

And know that the clear transmission in the sayings of our companions is that *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān is not permitted (*lā yajūz*) except by sound traditions (*al-āthir al-ṣaḥīḥ*) from the Prophet (God's blessings on him and his family) and from the Imāms (peace be upon them), whose sayings are proofs (*ḥujjah*) similar to the saying of the Prophet, and the teaching about [the Qur'ān] by opinion is not permitted. And the common people narrated that the Prophet said: “whoever interprets the Qur'ān with his opinion and reached the truth, is in error.” And a group of the Tābi'īn and the jurists of Medina detested the teaching about the Qur'ān by opinion: such as Sa'īd ibn al-Musayb and 'Ubayda al-Sulamānī, and Nāfi'a, and Muḥammad ibn al-Qāssam, and Sālim ibn 'Abd Allah, and others of them. And it was narrated about 'Aisha that she said: “the Prophet never

¹²⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, 4.

¹²⁵ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 96.

¹²⁶ Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imām* (London: Muhammadi Trust, 1982), 145.

interpreted the Qur'ān except for [what he said] after what Gabriel gave him about it.¹²⁷

In this passage, al-Ṭūsī's main concern seems to be with admonishing exegetes who use opinion to interpret the Qur'ān. It is also interesting to note his argument that interpretation must be derived from "sound traditions" related from Muḥammad or from the Imāms.

However, al-Ṭūsī reiterates the *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn* several paragraphs later, in a slightly different context, writing:

And [the Qur'ān] said, criticizing a group due to the fact that they did not contemplate the Qur'ān, nor did they reflect on its meanings: 'Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān, or are there locks upon [their] hearts?'¹²⁸ And the Prophet said, 'truly I have left you the two weighty things: the Book of God and my kindred the members of my household' and he explained that the Book is proof, as the kindred is proof. And how can that which could not be used to comprehend anything, be a proof?¹²⁹ And it was narrated about him, peace be upon him, that he said: 'if any *ḥadīth* about me comes to you, refer it to the Book of God, and accept what is consistent with the Book of God'... It was narrated similarly according to our Imāms, peace be upon them, that how is the presentation before the Book of God possible, while not understanding anything in it? And all of this indicates the clarity of this inherited report.¹³⁰

Here, al-Ṭūsī exhorts his audience first to contemplate the Qur'ān, then to use the Qur'ān and the *ahl al-bayt* as "proof" and, finally, to use the Qur'ān to verify *ḥadīth* about

¹²⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, 4.

¹²⁸ Q 47:24. Translations and verse numbers are taken from the Sahih International.

¹²⁹ i.e., something can only be a proof if it can be used to understand things.

¹³⁰ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, 4-5.

Muḥammad. Bar Asher argues that “in Sunnī exegesis the practice of the Prophet (*sunnat al-nabī*) is used as a tool for the interpretation of the Qur’ān... [and] in Imāmī tradition, the family of the Prophet plays the equivalent role.”¹³¹ However, in these passages from al-Ṭūsī, he paints a more reciprocal relationship between the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*, which depends on the clarity and soundness of the verses or traditions in question. The sound traditions about Muḥammad and the Imāms are to be used in interpreting the vague elements of the Qur’ān,¹³² perhaps implying that the Qur’ān’s clear passages can authenticate traditions whose soundness is in question.

Continuing with his discussion about the meanings of the Qur’ān, al-Ṭūsī writes, “And this is what we say about that: truly, incompatibility and opposition are not permitted in the speech of God Almighty or in the speech of His Prophet. And God Almighty said: ‘Indeed, We have made it an Arabic Qur’ān (that you might understand),’¹³³ and said, ‘In a clear Arabic language,’¹³⁴ and said, ‘And We did not send any messenger [speaking] other than the language of his people,’¹³⁵ and said,

¹³¹ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 95.

¹³² “And know that the clear transmission in the sayings of our companions is that *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān is not permitted except by sound traditions from the Prophet (God’s blessings on him and his family) and from the Imāms (peace be upon them),” al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 4.

¹³³ Q 43:3.

¹³⁴ Q 26:195.

¹³⁵ Q 14:4.

‘everything is explained in it,’ and said, ‘We have not neglected anything in the Book.’

And how is it possible to describe [the Qur’ān] as being in clear Arabic, and in the tongue of its people, and as an explanation to the people, but [yet] nothing can be understood from its apparent meaning?”¹³⁶ Al-Ṭūsī is arguing that the meaning of the cited verses is that the Qur’ān is intelligible and accessible.

Four Categories of Meaning in the Qur’ān

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī argues that “the [interpretation of] the meanings of the Qur’ān has four types,”¹³⁷ i.e., there are four categories of Qur’ānic text, and each category has its own type of interpretation. The first is that the Qur’ān cannot be interpreted through opinion; the second category is the Qur’ān’s apparent meaning, the third is that the Qur’ān delivers injunctions whose details are found elsewhere; and the fourth category are words that contain more than one meaning. To explain the first category, al-Ṭūsī writes, “it is not permitted for anyone to take upon himself to interpret it or to claim the knowledge [of its interpretation], and this is like the saying of the Almighty: ‘They ask you, [O Muḥammad], about the Hour: when is its arrival? Say: Its knowledge is only with my Lord. None will reveal its time except Him.’”¹³⁸ And like the saying of the Almighty:

¹³⁶ Q 6:38. al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 4.

¹³⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 5.

¹³⁸ Q7:87.

'Truly the knowledge of the Hour is with God,'¹³⁹ et cetera. And God Almighty has not favored taking knowledge upon oneself in error."¹⁴⁰ Al-Ṭūsī is arguing that humans cannot expect to know the knowledge that God has retained for Himself (e.g., knowledge of the Hour, or Judgment Day).

In the second category, al-Ṭūsī argues that although hidden knowledge exists (as seen in the first meaning), the second type of Qur'ānic verse is that which has an apparent meaning that is clear to everyone. Al-Ṭūsī writes, "That which was its apparent [meaning] corresponds to its meaning, and everyone who knew the language which was delivered in it, knew its meaning, as the Almighty said: '... And do not kill the soul which God has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right.'¹⁴¹ And like the saying of the Almighty: 'Say, He is God, [who is] One,'¹⁴² et cetera."¹⁴³

Al-Ṭūsī lists the third category of the meanings of the Qur'ān, writing:

The third of them is: What is a general [concept], of which the apparent [meaning] does not reveal what is intended in detail. Like the saying of the Almighty: 'And establish prayer and give *zakāt*,'¹⁴⁴ and like His saying: 'And [due]

¹³⁹ Q 31:34.

¹⁴⁰ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, 5.

¹⁴¹ Q 6:151.

¹⁴² Q 112:1.

¹⁴³ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, 5.

¹⁴⁴ Q 2:43. This is also found in 2:83; 4:76; Surat al-Hajj: 78; Surat al-Nur: 56; Surat al-Jadilah: 13; Surat al-Mazmal: 2.

to God from the people is a pilgrimage to the House¹⁴⁵ – for whoever is able to find thereto a way.¹⁴⁶ And His saying: ‘and give its due [*zakāf*] on the day of its harvest.’¹⁴⁷ And His saying: ‘[And those] within whose wealth is a known right,’¹⁴⁸ and what is similar to that. And the detailing of the number of prayers and the number of the *rakāt*, and the details of the rituals of the Hajj and its conditions, and the amounts of the ‘minimum amount of property liable to payment of the *zakāt* tax’ in the *zakāt* cannot be explained except by the Prophet, and by the revelation from God Almighty.¹⁴⁹

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī argues here that the Qur’ān makes references to broad concepts, such as prayer and charity, but does not give the specific details, leaving those details to Muḥammad and the Imāms instead. This line of argument has precedent which we see in our discussion of interpretations of Q 4:59 and the phrase “those in authority among you.” Earlier Twelver exegetes, such as al-‘Ayyāshī and Furāt Ibn Furāt al-Kūfī, both make this argument to explain why the Qur’ān contains no explicit mention of the Imāmate, explaining that the Imāmate belongs to the class of specific details that the Qur’ān omits.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 5.

¹⁴⁶ Q 3:97.

¹⁴⁷ Q 6:141.

¹⁴⁸ Q 70:24.

¹⁴⁹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Al-‘Ayyāshī writes: “And the Shī’a existed before Abū Ja’far existed, and they did not know the (pilgrimage) ritual of their Hajj, neither that which is lawful for them, nor that which is forbidden to them, until there was Abū Ja’far, and he clarified for them and explained the ritual of their Hajj [*manāsik*], and that which is lawful for them and that which is forbidden to them, until the people

Al-Ṭūsī writes that the fourth category is when a word has more than two meanings. In such a scenario, al-Ṭūsī argues that “it is not permitted that one who prefers one [of the meanings] says: the intention of God in [the word] is one of what [the word] could mean – except for the opinion of a Prophet, or an Imām who is immune from sin,”¹⁵¹ i.e., no one but a Prophet or an Imām¹⁵² can determine which meaning the word ought to carry.

Al-Ṭūsī stresses the importance of consensus, writing that “one ought not consider the *tafsīr* of a verse, whose apparent [meaning] does not inform of the intention in details, or emulate anyone of the commentators, unless the *ta’wīl* is agreed upon by consensus; then it is necessary to follow it because of the value of consensus.”¹⁵³ Al-

were not in need... and the earth would not exist except by an imām.” Muḥammad ibn Mas’ūd al-‘Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr / li-Abī al-Naḍr Muḥammad ibn Mas’ūd al-‘Ayyāshī; taḥqīq Qism al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmīyah, Mu’assasat al-Bi’tḥah*, Vol. 1 (Qūm: Mu’assasat al-Bi’tḥah, 2000), 412. Similarly, Furāt Ibn Furāt al-Kūfī writes: “I said: If the people say ‘what is the meaning of not naming Ali and his family in the Book of God?’ Abū Ja’far said: tell them that God revealed the prayer to His Messenger but did not name three or four until the Messenger of God (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was the one who explained this to them, and God revealed the Hajj but did not reveal: turn seven times. And the Messenger of God (peace and blessings upon him and his family) explained this to them, and God revealed ‘Obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you.’ It was revealed about ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, peace be upon them.” Furāt ibn Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī / ta’līf Abī al-Qāsim Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Furāt al-Kūfī; taḥqīq Muḥammad al-Kāzīm*, Vol. 1 (Bayrūt: Mu’assasat al-Nu’mān, 1992), 110.

¹⁵¹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 6.

¹⁵² Because al-Ṭūsī writes “an Imām who is immune from sin,” it is clear that he restricts the term “Imām” to the Twelve Shī’a Imāms.

¹⁵³ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 6.

Ṭūsī praises some earlier scholars while critiquing others, noting that it is important to follow consensus because “[some of] the commentators’ methods and schools are praiseworthy, such as Ibn ‘Abbās, and al-Ḥasan, and Qatādah, and Mujāhid, et al., and from among them are ones whom fault is found with their schools, such as Abū Ṣālih, and al-Sadī and al-Kalbī, et al. [And all] that is in the first *ṭabaqah*.”¹⁵⁴

Writing about the later scholars, al-Ṭūsī argues that “each one of them supported his school, and interprets [in a manner] that correlates with his origin, [thus] it is not permitted for anyone to emulate any of them, but it is necessary to return to the correct proofs: be it reason (*al-‘aqlīyah*), or legal (*al-shar‘īah*), whether [justified by] consensus, or transmitted [through multiple transmitters] from those whose sayings must be followed.”¹⁵⁵ In contrast, al-Ṭūsī writes that “one narration (*ḵabar wāḥid*) is not accepted [in this regard], especially¹⁵⁶ if it was partly based on reason.”¹⁵⁷ Al-Ṭūsī notes as well that “as for the path of a tradition attested only once in *ḥadīth* (*al-āḥād*), such as the narrations of an anomaly and the rare expression, it [cannot be] used as certain, and [cannot] be made evidence against the Book of God.”¹⁵⁸ In his discussion of al-Ṭūsī’s

¹⁵⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 6.

¹⁵⁵ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 6.

¹⁵⁶ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 6.

¹⁵⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 7.

¹⁵⁸ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 7.

views on genuine traditions, Heinz Halm notes that al-Ṭūsī accepted *āḥād* traditions, as long as their transmitters “could definitely be classified as a member of the ‘group which is right’ (*al-ṭā’ifa al-muḥiqqa*) i.e., the Imāmiyya.”¹⁵⁹ Al-Ṭūsī puts a premium on consensus and multiple transmissions, arguing that traditions that appear once cannot be given weight.

Seven Recitations of the Qur’ān

Annemarie Schimmel writes that “the number seven has fascinated humankind since time immemorial,” and she explains that even the attribution of special characteristics to the numbers three (with its spiritual significance) and four (with its material significance) is due, in part, to their cumulative value.¹⁶⁰ Speaking specifically of the importance of the number seven within the Islamic tradition, Schimmel writes that the first sūra of the Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Fatiha, addresses “three of its seven verses... to God” while four verses “mention humanity’s petitions and needs.”¹⁶¹ Of course, pre-Islamic uses of the number seven are far too numerous to detail here, but examples of the number seven within Islam include the “circumambulation of the Kaaba in Mecca,” the “seven sleepers” of Q 18:21, the seven “internal aspects of the Quran, which have been

¹⁵⁹ Halm, *Shī’ism*, 52.

¹⁶⁰ Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 127.

¹⁶¹ Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers*, 135.

emphasized in later mystical writings and Shiite esoteric hermeneutics,” and seven “canonical forms of Quran recitation.”¹⁶²

Although not strictly a multiple of seven, the number seventy-two also has great significance in Islam and is relevant to this discussion of divisions within Islam. Roy Mottahedeh quotes several versions of the *ḥadīth al-tafriqah* (translated as “tradition concerning division”).¹⁶³ In the first two versions of this *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad tells his followers that his community will ultimately divide itself into seventy-three sects (*millah*), but in the second version, Muḥammad adds that “all of them are in hell-fire except one religious group.”¹⁶⁴ In the third iteration of this *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad says that “my community will divide into seventy-two, all of them in hell-fire except one.”¹⁶⁵ Interpretations of this *ḥadīth*, especially of which sect is spared from the fires, vary depending on which group is transmitting the tradition. Mottahedeh argues that “not the least curious thing about this family of traditions is the claim that Islam should be superior in number of sectarian divisions” since, in each variation of the *ḥadīth*, the Jewish and Christian communities are each said to have one less sect than the Muslim

¹⁶² Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers*, 146-7.

¹⁶³ Roy P. Mottahedeh, “Pluralism and Islamic Traditions of Sectarian Divisions,” *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift*, Arg. 82 (2006): 156.

¹⁶⁴ Mottahedeh, “Pluralism and Islamic Traditions of Sectarian Divisions,” 156.

¹⁶⁵ Mottahedeh, “Pluralism and Islamic Traditions of Sectarian Divisions,” 156.

community.¹⁶⁶ Perhaps most interesting for our discussion – and for al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's examination of the seven recitations and meanings of the Qur'ān – is the acknowledgement such sectarian divides, and even the claim to more of these divides than other religions.

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī addresses the question of seven recitations (*qirā'āt*) and seven meanings (*abwāb*, *ma'āni*, or *aḥruf*), but does not seem to differentiate between these various terms.¹⁶⁷ Al-Ṭūsī next addresses the view that the Qur'ān has seven meanings, or, according to some scholars, recitations. Al-Ṭūsī asserts his argument, stating, “and know that the knowledge from the school of our companions... is that the Qur'ān was revealed in one type (*ḥarf*), to one prophet.”¹⁶⁸ Presenting the opposing argument, al-Ṭūsī writes, “and those of other *madhhabs* narrated to us that the Prophet said, ‘the Qur'ān was revealed in seven ways (*aḥruf*)’... And according to some of them, ‘in seven chapters.’”¹⁶⁹ Ayoub notes that al-Ṭūsī's rejection of the “seven modes or dialects,” as well as his rejection of “not only the principle of *tahrīf*, but also any suggestion that the Qur'ān in use is not the true and authentic Qur'ān” came at a time of “relative stability” –

¹⁶⁶ Mottahedeh, “Pluralism and Islamic Traditions of Sectarian Divisions,” 156.

¹⁶⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, 7.

¹⁶⁸ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, 7.

¹⁶⁹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, 7.

presumably in the political situation at large and for the Twelver Shī'a community in particular.¹⁷⁰

Although al-Ṭūsī disagrees with this premise, he elaborates on the seven meanings, writing, “and they disagreed over the explanation of the report, and a group chose that its meaning of seven meanings was: command (*'amr*), prohibition (*nahī*), promise (*wa'ad*), threat (*wa'id*), debate (*jadal*), narrative (*qaṣṣaṣ*), and parables (*'amthāl*). And Ibn Mas'ūd narrated that the Prophet said, ‘the Qur’ān was revealed in seven ways: reprimand (*zajār*), command (*'amr*), permitted (*ḥalāl*), forbidden (*ḥarām*), strength (*muḥkam*), obscure [passages] (*mutashābih*), and parables (*'amthāl*).”¹⁷¹

Al-Ṭūsī then turns to another interpretation of the phrase “the Qur’ān was revealed in seven ways,” explaining that some scholars understood it to mean “seven different languages (*lughāt*),”¹⁷² while other scholars said, “the Qur’ān was revealed in seven languages from among the literary languages (*al-lughāt al-faṣīḥah*), because some of the tribes were more literary than others,’ and this is what al-Ṭabaṛī chose.”¹⁷³ Finally, al-Ṭūsī addresses the question of the seven recitations, writing, “and some of them said that there are seven differences between the recitations (*al-qirā'āt*).”¹⁷⁴ Al-Ṭūsī

¹⁷⁰ Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān,” 189.

¹⁷¹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 7.

¹⁷² al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 7.

¹⁷³ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 7.

gives examples of different grammatical methods as he explains the seven recitation options; these tend to depend on the end vocalization of words (*i'rāb*), vowels (*ḥarakāt*), letters (*ḥurūf*) of words without end vocalization, differences in the ordering (*al-ikhtilāf bi'l-taqdīm wa'l-ta'khīr naḥwi qawluhū*) of certain phrases,¹⁷⁵ and differences in adding and omitting the order of phrases.¹⁷⁶

Al-Ṭūsī argues that “the explanation of the Qur’ān does not come out of one of the seven divisions (*al-aqsām*),”¹⁷⁷ and then proceeds to list the first set of divisions that he quoted earlier.¹⁷⁸ He then writes, “this is what our companions mentioned in the divisions of the interpretation of the Qur’ān. As for what was narrated according to the Prophet, that he said, ‘there was no verse revealed in the Qur’ān that did not have an outer (*ẓahr*) and inner (*baṭn*) meaning,’¹⁷⁹ our companions narrated this on the authority

¹⁷⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 8.

¹⁷⁵ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 8.

¹⁷⁶ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 9.

¹⁷⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 9.

¹⁷⁸ These are command, prohibition, promise, threat, debate, narrative, and equivalency. al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 7.

¹⁷⁹ Ismail K. Poonawala writes that both Imāmi and Ismā’īlī Shī’a associate the *ẓahr* with “the principles of *tanzīl*” and the *baṭn* with *ta’wīl*. Poonawala states that “the former refers to the revealed text of the Qur’ān and the latter to its inner, esoteric meaning.” Poonawala, I. “al-Ẓāhir wa ’l-Bāṭin.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2013. [Reference](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-zahir-wa-l-batin-SIM_8078). Harvard University. 28 October 2013 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-zahir-wa-l-batin-SIM_8078>

of the Imāms (peace be upon them).¹⁸⁰ Although he is opposed to the idea that there are seven variant readings of the Qur’ān, al-Ṭūsī advocates for the view that Qur’ānic verses hold different interpretations.

The relationship that al-Ṭūsī describes between the inner and outer meanings of verses provides a contrast with the Ismā’īlī Shī’ī conception of these two aspects, with the Twelver view keeping the inner and outer meanings more separate from each other than the Ismā’īlī conception of these two aspects. Ismail Poonawala writes that “Ismā’īlīs stress that both [*ẓahr* and *baṭn*] are not only complementary to each other, but that they are also intertwined with each other like body and soul. One without the other, therefore, cannot exist.”¹⁸¹ Ayoub notes that al-Ṭūsī advocates “a moderate view of *ẓahr* and *baṭn*,” but also writes that, in addition to its outer and inner dimensions, the Qur’ān “must have many references beyond the apparent meaning.”¹⁸² In his acceptance of *ẓahr* and *baṭn*, but refusal to join the two concepts as closely as they wedded in Ismā’īlī doctrine, al-Ṭūsī is formulating a Twelver approach towards textual analysis that is of a piece with his general attitudes towards the esoteric.

Six Parts of the Qur’ān

¹⁸⁰ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 9.

¹⁸¹ Ismail K. Poonawala, “Ismā’īlī *ta’wīl* of the Qur’ān,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin, 199-222 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 199.

¹⁸² Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān,” 187.

Al-Ṭūsī lists four intentions of meaning, the third of which is, “the meaning of ‘its outer meaning (*ẓāhir*) is its articulated speech (*lafẓ*), and its inner meaning (*bāṭin*) is its esoteric meaning (*ta’wīl*),’ which is mentioned by al-Ṭabarī and chosen by al-Balkhī.”¹⁸³ The idea that the Qur’ān contains both an inner and outer meaning predates al-Ṭūsī in Shī’ī intellectual circles. Bar Asher quotes al-‘Ayyāshī writing, “The Qur’ān has an internal and an external [dimension] (*inna l-qur’ān lahu ẓahr wa baṭn*),”¹⁸⁴ and notes that, although Twelver commentators valued the esoteric meaning, “they never discarded the literal meaning of the texts.”¹⁸⁵ Ayoub argues that *ta’wīl* (synonymous with the inner meaning, or *bāṭin*) carries two meanings; in the first, *ta’wīl* and *tafsīr* are the same, while “the second sense of *ta’wīl* is that basic level of meaning which only God knows.”¹⁸⁶

For the fourth meaning, al-Ṭūsī writes, “and the fourth is what Ḥasan al-Basrī said, ‘if you searched for its inner meaning and sought its outer meaning, then you will have understood its meaning’ and all of the parts of the Qur’ān are not fewer than six:

¹⁸³ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 9.

¹⁸⁴ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 123. *tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*, 2:16, 36.

¹⁸⁵ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 123.

¹⁸⁶ Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān,” 188. Ayoub does not provide a citation for this double interpretation of *ta’wīl*, other than a reference to Q 43:1-4 (“...Indeed, We have made it an Arabic Qur’ān that you might understand...”) which supports Ayoub’s first interpretation, i.e., that the Qur’ān is intended to be understood.

clear passages (*muḥkam*),¹⁸⁷ ambiguous passages (*mutashābih*), the verses that abrogate (*nāsikh*), verses that are abrogated (*mansūkh*), the specific (*khāṣ*), and the general (*‘ām*).¹⁸⁸ Fudge explains that the “*muḥkam* and *mutashābih* (‘clear’ and ‘ambiguous’) verses of Q 3:7 were often equated with the abrogating and abrogated, respectively, but they were susceptible of even wider application,”¹⁸⁹ and David Powers notes that al-Ṭabarī attributes this view to Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn Mas‘ūd, Qatāda, al-Rabī‘, and al-Ḍaḥḥāk.¹⁹⁰ Al-Ṭūsī’s view seems to be that the abrogating and abrogated verses are separate from – although closely related to – the clear and obscure passages.

Explaining the first of these, al-Ṭūsī writes, “as for the clear verses... it is in the way of God’s saying, ‘God does not charge¹⁹¹ a soul except [with that within] its capacity,’¹⁹² and His saying, ‘And do not kill the soul that God has forbidden [to be killed] except by [legal] right,’¹⁹³ and His saying, ‘Say, ‘He is God, [who is] One,’”¹⁹⁴ and His

¹⁸⁷ Or, simply, “precise,” as is given in Q 3:7, which al-Ṭūsī quotes on page 11.

¹⁸⁸ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 9.

¹⁸⁹ Fudge, *Qur’ānic Hermeneutics*, 11.

¹⁹⁰ David S. Powers, “The Exegetical Genre *nāsikh al-Qur’ān wa mansūkuhu*,” in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin, 117-38 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 118.

¹⁹¹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 9.

¹⁹² Q 2:286.

¹⁹³ Q 6:151.

saying, 'He neither begets nor is born, Nor is there to Him any equivalent,'¹⁹⁵... and His saying, 'I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.'"¹⁹⁶ The verses that al-Ṭūsī provides here have clear meaning and, incidentally, al-Ṭūsī has chosen examples that provide instructions on the worship of God and God's oneness.

Moving to the second intention, ambiguous Qur'ānic passages, al-Ṭūsī explains, "and the ambiguous is called so because of the resemblance of what is intended from it with what is not intended in the way of God's saying, 'Oh [how great is] my regret over what I neglected in regard to God (*fī janab Allah*),'¹⁹⁷ and His saying, 'and the heavens will be folded in His right hand,'¹⁹⁸ and His saying, 'Sailing under Our eyes (*bā'ayninā*) [as reward for he who had been denied],"¹⁹⁹ and His saying, "[God] sends astray whom He wills,"²⁰⁰ and His saying, 'so He deafened them and blinded their vision and put a stamp upon their hearts.'"²⁰¹ Al-Ṭūsī is arguing that ambiguity is found wherever the

¹⁹⁴ Q 112:1.

¹⁹⁵ Q 112:3-4.

¹⁹⁶ Q 51:56.

¹⁹⁷ Q 39:56. The literal translation of this phrase is "by the side of God," which can be understood as having an anthropomorphic meaning.

¹⁹⁸ Q 39:67.

¹⁹⁹ Q 54:14.

²⁰⁰ Q 14:4.

intended meaning is too similar to the unintended meaning, thereby implying that either meaning might be correct.

Interestingly, most of the verses that al-Ṭūsī uses as examples of Qur’ānic ambiguity contain some reference to anthropomorphic concepts, especially God’s right hand in Q 39:67 and God’s eyes and vision in Q 54:14. Al-Ṭūsī’s reference to God’s punishments in Q 47:23 is perhaps a nod to the debate over God’s justice. Fudge notes that the Mu’tazilites found support in Q 3:7 for their view that “of doctrinally significant verses, there were those whose literal or evident meanings did not require clarification, and those requiring some kind of exegetical effort or expertise to reach a proper understanding.”²⁰² Fudge also writes that earlier Shī’a exegetes, such as al-‘Ayyāshī, “show no interest in the other aspects of the scripture beyond their limited sectarian agenda,” and gives al-‘Ayyāshī’s commentary on Q 3:7 as an example, since al-‘Ayyāshī argues that the “clear verses” refer to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the Imāms, while the “ambiguous verses” refer to Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān.²⁰³ It is this type of example that shows al-Ṭūsī’s departure from earlier Shī’a commentary and his deep involvement with the theological debates of his own time.

²⁰¹ Q 47:23. al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 10.

²⁰² Fudge, *Qur’ānic Hermeneutics*, 115.

²⁰³ Fudge, *Qur’ānic Hermeneutics*, 17.

Al-Ṭūsī cites the critique that the Qur’ān cannot contain both clarity and ambiguity, quoting his detractors as saying, “‘how do they say that the Qur’ān contains in it precision and ambiguity... this is the way of His saying, ‘Alif, Lam, Ra. [This is] a Book whose verses are perfected,’²⁰⁴ and ‘God has sent down the best statement: a consistent Book wherein is reiteration,’²⁰⁵ and ‘It is He who has sent down to you the Book; in it are verses that are precise – they are the foundation of the Book – and others unspecific.’”²⁰⁶ Al-Ṭūsī responds to this criticism, writing, “we say: it is not mutually exclusive in this, because He ascribed to all of it the quality of being clear, the intention in it in such a manner that it did not reach incorrectness, contradiction, disagreement, disparity or conflict, but there was nothing from it that was not in the utmost of the [legal] judgment - either in its outer meaning or in its proof.”²⁰⁷ Al-Ṭūsī is arguing that, despite the unspecific verses, no part of the Qur’ān lacks clarity.

Turning to the concept of abrogation, al-Ṭūsī writes, “as for the verses that abrogate (*nāsikh*), it is all legitimate proof that indicates an end such as the (legal) judgment that is fixed in the first text in the future regarding, if not fixed, in the first text... We consider the proof of Revelation because it is a proof of reason when it indicates an

²⁰⁴ Q 11:1.

²⁰⁵ Q 39:23.

²⁰⁶ Q 3:7.

²⁰⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 11.

end such as the (legal) judgment that is fixed in the first text and not called abrogation.”²⁰⁸ Al-Ṭūsī is explaining that some verses can abrogate others, but that there are legal judgments that are fixed and not abrogated by later verses. Classical Shī’a scholarship wholeheartedly accepts the theory of abrogation,²⁰⁹ even if there are disagreements over its exact implications. Ayoub cites a tradition from the fifth Imām, which states that “abrogating verses are those which continue unchanged in application or relevance, and abrogated verses are those which have already been fulfilled,”²¹⁰ which differs somewhat from the standard understanding of certain verses abrogating earlier verses on the same subjects.

Al-Ṭūsī writes that there are three categories of abrogation in the Qur’ān: the first is the “abrogation of its legal judgment (*ḥukm*) without its enunciation (*lafẓ*),” and al-Ṭūsī notes that his proof texts “invalidate the opinion of those who prohibit the permissibility of abrogation in the Qur’ān.”²¹¹ The second is “what abrogates its pronunciation without its legal judgment,” and the third is “what abrogates its pronunciation and its legal

²⁰⁸ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 12.

²⁰⁹ In contrast, Ayoub provides the example of al-Khūṭī, a modern Twelver Shī’a scholar who viewed the theory of abrogation as “unacceptable.” Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān,” 191.

²¹⁰ Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’ān and the Silent Qur’ān,” 189. Ayoub does not provide the original source for this tradition.

²¹¹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 13.

judgment.”²¹² Al-Ṭūsī explains that he addresses the specifics of abrogation – the “words in the conditions of abrogation [and] what is correct from among them and what is not correct” – in his book, *Kitāb al-‘uddah*,²¹³ about *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and that such a discussion is “not proper” in his exegesis.²¹⁴ Nonetheless, al-Ṭūsī continues his discussion of the overall concepts of abrogation, noting al-Balkhī’s views of the subject,²¹⁵ and also taking issue with the opinions of Mu’tazilite scholars, such as al-Nizām and al-Jāḥiẓ.²¹⁶

Al-Ṭūsī next turns to the discussion of repetition in the Qur’ān, highlighting similarities in the stories of Muḥammad, Moses, Jesus, and Noah, and explaining that the purpose of these reiterations is that “God wanted – in His kindness and His mercy – to make these stories known to the ends of the earth and to share [these stories] in every ear, and to fix them in every heart.”²¹⁷ Al-Ṭūsī spills considerably more ink over the question of repetition and emphasis, citing Qur’ānic verses as examples of emphasis (*al-tawkīd*), as well as poetry in which certain words are repeated – presumably also for emphasis.²¹⁸ Al-Ṭūsī mentions the frequently-used construction “most gracious, most

²¹² al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 13.

²¹³ *Kitāb al-‘adah* may be another way of referring to al-Ṭūsī’s work, *‘Uddat al-uṣūl*.

²¹⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 13.

²¹⁵ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 13-14.

²¹⁶ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 14.

²¹⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 14.

merciful” (*al-rahmān al-rahīm*) as an example of the “repetition of a singular meaning in two different utterances.”²¹⁹

Al-Ṭūsī concludes this portion of his introduction, writing, “it was narrated according to Ibn Mas‘ūd that Muḥammad said, ‘there was a man from among us who learned ten verses without going past them until he knew their meanings and the practical applications in them.’ And it was narrated that ‘Alī ‘Abd Allah ibn al-‘Abbās went on the Ḥajj and delivered a sermon that caused the Turks (*al-Turk*) and the Byzantines (*al-Rūm*) to become Muslim when they heard it. Then he recited Sūrat al-Nūr to them – and narrated Sūrat al-Baqarah – and commented on [the sūras] to them (*fasaraha*). And a man said, ‘if I had heard this, I would have become a Muslim,’ and it was narrated according to Sa‘īd ibn al-Jabbār that whoever recites the Qur’ān but does not comment on it is as the foreigner or the Arab.”²²⁰ This closing anecdote illustrates the necessity of Qur’ānic commentary, as al-Ṭūsī argues that it is not enough merely to read or recite the Qur’ān. Here, he stresses the importance of exegesis, and this story implies that it is

²¹⁸ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 15.

²¹⁹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 15.

²²⁰ This is a surprising formulation indeed; it is logical that al-Ṭūsī would write that someone who recites the Qur’ān without commenting on it is as the foreigner, but somewhat confounding that he would have made the foreigner and the Arab equivalent. Perhaps this is a misprint, and (or) perhaps al-Ṭūsī meant *‘arrāb*, or “translator,” someone who (like the foreigner) might not be adequately familiar with the Arabic language. al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 17.

hearing the commentary – as well as the Qur’ān itself – that motivates the bystander to say that he would have become a Muslim.

The Naming of the Qur’ān and the Designation of the Chapters and Verses

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī writes that God gave the Qur’ān four names, first calling it the Qur’ān in the verse “Indeed, We have made it an Arabic Qur’ān”²²¹ and in the verse “The month of Ramadan [is that] in which the Qur’ān was revealed.”²²² Secondly, God refers to the Qur’ān as “*al-furqān*,” literally meaning “the Proof” in the verse “Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion upon His Servant that he may be to the worlds a warner.”²²³ In the verse “[All] praise is [due] to God, who has sent down upon His Servant the Book and has not made therein any deviance, He has made it straight,”²²⁴ the Qur’ān is called “*al-kitāb*,” or “the Book.” The fourth name for the Qur’ān is “*al-dhikr*” (mindful mention) which is mentioned in the verse “Indeed, it is We who sent down the Qur’ān and indeed, We will be its guardian.”²²⁵

Later, al-Ṭūsī responds to the rhetorical challenge offered by a critic who might say “how is a recitation (*qirā’a*) called a Qur’ān when it is readable (*maqrū’*)?” by

²²¹ Q 43:3.

²²² Q 2:185. al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 17.

²²³ Q 25:1. al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 17.

²²⁴ Q 18:1. al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 17.

²²⁵ Al-Ṭūsī cites Q 15:15, but Sahih International considers this the ninth verse of the fifteenth chapter. al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 18.

answering that “it is called [a Qur’ān] just as what is writeable (*al-maktūb*) is called a book (*kitāb*).”²²⁶ Al-Ṭūsī then explains that the Qur’ān is referred to as *furqān* because it “separates (*yufarriq*) between the truth and the falsehood.”²²⁷ Calling the Qur’ān the “source of speech” and the “Book of books,” al-Ṭūsī explains why the Qur’ān is called a book (*kitāb*).²²⁸ Finally, al-Ṭūsī writes that the Qur’ān is called “*al-dhikr*” (literally meaning “a commemoration” or “an invocation of God”) because it is a “reminder from God Almighty that mentions His servant in it” and because it “mentions and honors whoever has faith in it and believes in what is in it.”²²⁹

Conclusions

Bruce Fudge argues that the early Twelver exegetes, such as al-Qummī and al-‘Ayyāshī, wrote their commentaries in a different style and with different objectives than the later commentators, writing that the early commentaries “have as their sole objective the promotion of Shī‘ī doctrines (and concomitant denigration of Sunnism).”²³⁰ Chapters two and three of this dissertation will show a more nuanced distinction, focusing especially on the use of *ḥadīth*, between the early works and the classical period of

²²⁶ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 18.

²²⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 19.

²²⁸ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 19.

²²⁹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 19.

²³⁰ Fudge, *Qur’ānic Hermeneutics*, 17.

Twelver exegesis. However, Fudge highlights a trend towards moderation in the later works, which we have seen in al-Ṭūsī's introduction to his *tafsīr*, especially as he rejects certain elements of Twelver Shī'a polemic (such as his the argument that the Qur'ānic text was tampered with) and often seems to take more pains to elucidate his opponents' arguments than his own.

In the introduction to his *tafsīr*, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī argues for the necessity of Qur'ānic exegesis, writing that Muslims must be able to understand the Qur'ān and that exegesis is required in this endeavor. Al-Ṭūsī argues that the Qur'ān is a proof (*ḥujjah*), which necessarily means that it must be comprehensible. He elucidates the different types of *tafsīr* and argues against interpretation through opinion (*tafsīr bi'l-ra'ī*) even though this is often his own method of exegesis. Despite his criticisms of Mu'tazilite scholars, such as al-Balkhī and al-Jubbā'ī, al-Ṭūsī often engages with them in their own rhetorical terms, especially in his departure from relying almost exclusively on *ḥadīth* as proof texts in his work.

However, what is perhaps even more telling than what al-Ṭūsī writes in his introduction is what he neglects. Although he is writing roughly one century after the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām, al-Ṭūsī does not mention the Imām's absence, instead stressing the importance of the Imāmate and Muḥammad's family (*ahl al-bayt*). Citing the *ḥadīth al-thaqalayn* regarding the Qur'ān and Muḥammad's family, al-Ṭūsī argues that both the Qur'ān and the line of Imāms will be present throughout eternity, implying

that the Occultation is a temporary state. Al-Ṭūsī's *tafsīr*, in order to stand the test of time and to maintain continued relevance, must view the *ahl al-bayt* as permanent and the Imām's absence as temporary.

Although al-Ṭūsī provides a blueprint for Qur'ānic interpretation, this introduction and, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, his commentaries on subsequent Qur'ānic verses, lack an elucidation of Twelver doctrine. Most notably, al-Ṭūsī discusses the Imāms and their role in exegesis and *ḥadīth*, but this introduction contains no mention of the Occultation or the Imām's absence. Al-Ṭūsī's choice of subjects provides another piece of evidence that his *tafsīr* is written for an intended audience of like-minded exegetes, as his instructions in this text are only applicable for scholars who are also carrying out the task of interpreting the Qur'ān, rather than providing guidance for the Shī'a community at large, in the absence of the Imām.

CHAPTER THREE

Interpreting “Those in Authority”: The Hermeneutics of Medieval Qur’ānic Commentary

The First Wave of Shī’ī Commentary

The earliest Shī’a Qur’ān commentators whose work survives lived at the end of the ninth century and died in the early part of the tenth. This was the era between the Lesser and Greater Occultations (260/874-329/941), and Shī’a theologians undertook the project of compiling *ḥadīth*, in part, to reassure the Shī’a community that the Twelfth Imām’s prolonged absence was no cause for conversion to Sunnī Islam or other sects of Shī’ism.²³¹ Three of the earliest Shī’a commentators are Furāt ibn Furāt al-Kūfī – who wrote *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī* (d. ca. 310/922),²³² ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī – author of *Tafsīr al-Qummī* (d. ca. 307/919-20),²³³ and Abū al-Naḍr Muḥammad ibn Mas’ūd ‘Ayyāshī – author of *al-Tafsīr* (d. ca. 320/932).²³⁴

²³¹ Heinz Halm argues that the emphasis that Shī’a scholars put on *ḥadīth* collection at this time was not unlike the Sunnī focus on *ḥadīth* one century earlier. Halm, *Shī’ism*, 40-1. As part of this effort, Muḥammad ibn Ya’qūb al-Kulaynī wrote *al-Kāfī fī ‘ilm al-dīn*, and Ibn Bābawayh wrote *Man lā yaḥḍuruḥu al-faqīh*, which became two of the four canonical *ḥadīth* collections of Shī’a Islam. Feras Hamza and Sajjad Rizvi, *An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries: Volume I* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24.

²³² Rippin, A. "Tafsīr (a.)." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-7294). Harvard University. 29 November 2011 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-7294>

²³³ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 28.

The *tafsīr* of the period naturally tends to reflect the interest in *ḥadīth*, and Meir Bar-Asher writes that “Furāt, al-Qummī, and al-‘Ayyāshī were contemporaries who lived in the important Shī‘ī centers of the day (Kūfa, Qum, and Khurāsān), which were probably in close touch with one another. It is thus likely (but not certain) that they met one another.”²³⁵ Bar-Asher argues that “the source of inspiration for a large part of these commentaries is common to all of them; the differences in the way these exegetical traditions are presented in each commentary often indicate merely the personal preferences of the commentators.”²³⁶ While the *tafāsīr* of the pre-Buyid Shī‘a commentators share the main characteristics that Bar-Asher identifies,²³⁷ I would argue that there are genuine distinctions between these three authors that I will explore.

Tafsīr al-Qummī, by ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, is “one of the most important works produced by the school of Qum.”²³⁸ Al-Qummī taught al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) and may have also taught Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 381/991), both of whom were two of the earliest and most influential compilers of the *ḥadīth* of the Shī‘a Imāms. Al-Qummī’s

²³⁴ Rippin, A. “Tafsīr (a.)” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

²³⁵ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 71.

²³⁶ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 31.

²³⁷ Bar-Asher writes that “the characteristics that qualify the pre-Buyawhid Imāmī-Shī‘ī exegesis as a unique school are: (a) Exegesis by *ḥadīth*. (b) A selective concern with the text of the Qur’ān. (c) Scant interest in theology and in certain issues bearing on the institution of the Imāma. (d) An extreme anti-Sunnī tendency and a hostile attitude to the Companions of the Prophet.” Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 73.

²³⁸ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 9.

commentary on verse 59 of *Sūrat al-Nisa*’ is terse; he writes: “‘O you who believe, obey God and obey His Messenger and those in authority among you,’ meaning the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him).”²³⁹ Al-Qummī devotes one more sentence to the second clause of the Qur’ānic verse, but he does not name the “Commander of the Faithful” or mention ‘Alī (although presumably his audience would have understood “Commander of the Faithful” as a direct reference to ‘Alī). More significantly, al-Qummī does not mention any of ‘Alī’s descendents, although later commentators will include the Imāms in their discussions of the phrase “those in authority among you.”²⁴⁰

Furāt Ibn Furāt and al-‘Ayyāshī bear greater stylistic resemblance to each other than either does to al-Qummī, as both rely on *ḥadīth* to make their arguments,²⁴¹ and both provide extensive interpretations of Qur’ān 4:59. Although both mention the family of Muḥammad in their explanations of who are “those in authority,” al-‘Ayyāshī mentions both of ‘Alī’s sons by name, and writes that Muḥammad named all of the Imāms:

²³⁹ ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī / li-Abī al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī; ṣaḥḥaḥahu wa-‘allaqa ‘alāyhi wa-qaddama la-hu Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazā’irī*, Vol. 1 (Bayrūt, Lubnān: Dār al-Surūr, 1991), 169.

²⁴⁰ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 107.

²⁴¹ Unlike the later commentators, Furāt ibn Furāt and al-‘Ayyāshī rely on *ḥadīth* from the Shī’a Imāms as proof-text. Hamza and Rizvi, *An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries*, 25-7. This characteristic also differentiates them from al-Qummī’s treatment of this particular verse.

172/1014: On the authority of Abbān: he went to Abū 'l-Ḥassan al-Riḍā²⁴² (peace be upon him), and said: "And I asked him [Muḥammad] about the Word of God: 'Oh you who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you.' And he said: 'this is 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib' (peace be upon him) and then he was silent," and he said: "And when his silence lengthened, I said: 'then who?' He said: 'Then al-Ḥassan' then he was silent. And when his silence lengthened I said: 'then who?' He said 'Al-Ḥussayn.' I said: 'then who?' He said: 'Then 'Alī ibn al-Ḥussayn' and was silent; and he continued to be silent before everyone until I repeated the question, and he spoke, until he named them until the last of them, peace be upon them."²⁴³

In a different *ḥadīth*, al-'Ayyāshī writes: "And the Messenger of God (peace and blessing upon him) said: "whoever dies and does not recognize the Imāms dies, dying in ignorance," and the Imām was 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, then it was al-Ḥassan ibn 'Alī, then it was al-Ḥussein ibn 'Alī, then it was 'Alī ibn al-Hussein, then it was Muḥammad ibn 'Alī Abu Ja'far."²⁴⁴

Perhaps the most explicit is the following *ḥadīth*, narrated on the authority of Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī,²⁴⁵ which reads:

And I said: O Messenger of God, name them to me. And he said: 'this, my son,' and placed his hand on the head of al-Ḥassan, 'then this, my son,' and placed his hand on the head of al-Ḥussain, 'then his son who is called 'Alī, and he will be born during your life, and tell him hello from me (*fa'iqra'hū minnī al-salām*),' then he finished up to twelve of the sons of Muḥammad (peace and blessings upon them).²⁴⁶

²⁴² The Eighth Imām, 'Alī al-Riḍa.

²⁴³ al-'Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 1, 410.

²⁴⁴ al-'Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 1, 412.

²⁴⁵ al-'Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 1, 412.

Here, al-‘Ayyāshī argues that Muḥammad knew that the number of imāms would be twelve. In contrast, Furāt ibn Furāt names ‘Alī’s sons but does not claim that Muḥammad specified that there would be twelve imāms. Furāt ibn Furāt writes: “According to Abū Ja‘far²⁴⁷ (peace be upon him) about the Word of God “Obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you,” he said, “And those in authority in this verse are the family of Muḥammad, peace and blessings upon him and upon his family.”²⁴⁸

Bar-Asher notes that Shī‘a exegetes were compelled to explain why “if indeed the Shī‘a is so central in the Qur’ān, why is it not mentioned explicitly?... It is a question that was constantly on the minds of Imāmī commentators, as a result of both internal reflection and the Shī‘ī need to defend its position against continual attacks on its excessive use of allegory and typology in its Qur’ān exegesis.”²⁴⁹ Bar-Asher writes that “Imāmī commentators use three arguments to explain the gap between the absence of any explicit mention of the Shī‘a in the Qur’ān and Shī‘ī claims that the book is replete with such allusions: a. The claim of forgery, i.e. issues relating to the Shī‘a, were

²⁴⁶ al-‘Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 1, 413.

²⁴⁷ The Fifth Imām.

²⁴⁸ Furāt ibn Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī / ta’līf Abī al-Qāsim Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Furāt al-Kūfī ; taḥqīq Muḥammad al-Kāẓim*, Vol. 1 (Bayrūt: Mu’assasat al-Nu‘mān, 1992), 108.

²⁴⁹ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 89.

deliberately omitted from the Qur'ān. b. The Qur'ān contains hidden meanings, which the exegete should decipher. c. The Qur'ān teaches principles while tradition expounds their details."²⁵⁰

Both Al-'Ayyāshī's commentary and Furāt ibn Furāt's reflect this anxiety, and both exegetes provide nearly identical explanations. Al-'Ayyāshī writes:²⁵¹ "And the Shī'a existed before Abū Ja'far existed, and they did not know the (pilgrimage) ritual of their Hajj, neither that which is lawful for them, nor that which is forbidden to them, until there was Abū Ja'far, and he clarified for them and explained the ritual of their Hajj [*manāsik*], and that which is lawful for them and that which is forbidden to them, until the people were not in need... and the earth would not exist except by an imām."²⁵² Elsewhere, al-'Ayyāshī relates a tradition in which Ja'far al-Ṣādiq said: "'Had the Qur'ān been read as it was sent down, you would have found us named in it.'"²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 89-90.

²⁵¹ Furāt ibn Furāt al-Kūfī gives a nearly identical *ḥadīth*, on the authority of 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Zahrī: "I said: If the people say 'what is the meaning of not naming Ali and his family in the Book of God?' Abū Ja'far said: tell them that God revealed the prayer to His Messenger but did not name three or four until the Messenger of God (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was the one who explained this to them, and God revealed the Hajj but did not reveal: turn seven times. And the Messenger of God (peace and blessings upon him and his family) explained this to them, and God revealed 'Obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you.' It was revealed about 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and al-Ḥassan and al-Ḥussayn, peace be upon them." al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, Vol. 1, 110.

²⁵² al-'Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 1, 412.

²⁵³ Ayoub, "The Speaking Qur'ān and the Silent Qur'ān," 183.

Furāt ibn Furāt and al-‘Ayyāshī exhibit their similarity to each other once again in their analysis of Qur’ān 4:59, as both quote the same *ḥadīth*. Furāt ibn Furāt attributes this *ḥadīth* to ‘Isa ibn al-Sarī, while al-‘Ayyāshī attributes the same *ḥadīth* to Yahya ibn al-Sarī,²⁵⁴ and both traditions are related as questions posed to Abū ‘Abdallah. Furāt’s version of the *ḥadīth* reads as follows²⁵⁵:

According to ‘Isa ibn al-Sarī, he said: I said to Abū ‘Abdallah, peace be upon him: Tell me about the pillars that Islam stands on, that none of the people are permitted to disobey a thing of them knowingly, that which, if someone neglects something from them, his religion will be destroyed for him, and his actions will not be accepted, [and whoever recognizes it and acts on it, his religion will be sound for him and his actions will be accepted], and he will not be dejected by what he is ignorant of among the things of which he is ignorant. He said: “Bearing witness that there is no God but God, and faith in His Messenger and acceptance of what comes from God, and *zakāt* and the sovereignty (*wilayāh*) in which God commanded the sovereignty (*wilayāh*) of [the Family of] Muḥammad, God’s peace and blessings upon him and his family.” He said “I said: is there something more or less important than something else in the Word of God: “Oh you who

²⁵⁴ It is possible, of course, that ‘Isa and Yahya are merely different names for the same individual.

²⁵⁵ The same *ḥadīth* is found in al-‘Ayyāshī: According to Yahya ibn al-Sarī, he said: “I said to Abū ‘Abdallah (peace be upon him): tell me the pillars of Islam upon which the religion is built, and that no one is permitted to disobey, that which, if someone neglects to recognize something of the pillar, his religion will be destroyed for him and his actions will not be accepted, and whoever recognizes it and acts on it, his religion will be sound for him, and his actions will be accepted, and his ignorance of a matter among matters will not harm him?” And he said: yes, bear witness that there is no God but God, and faith in His Messenger (peace and blessings upon him), and affirmation of what comes from God, and truth from the possessions the zakat, and the sovereignty in which God commanded the rule of the Family of Muḥammad. And the Messenger of God (peace and blessing upon him) said: “whoever dies and does not recognize the imams dies, dying in ignorance,” and the Imam was ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, then it was al-Hassan ibn ‘Alī, then it was al-Hussein ibn ‘Alī, then it was ‘Alī ibn al-Hussein, then it was Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī Abu Ja’far.” al-‘Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 1, 411-2.

believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you,” and the Commander of the Faithful was ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, peace be upon him.²⁵⁶

Far more interesting than the similarities between the commentators, however, are their differences. Furāt’s analysis of Qur’ān 4:59 is notable, in that he mentions “*ūlī ‘l-fiqh wa ‘l-‘ilm*”²⁵⁷ (those of fiqh and knowledge) and “*umarā sarāyan*”²⁵⁸ (the military commanders) as possible explanations for the meaning of “those in authority among you.” Both Furāt and al-‘Ayyāshī were probably contemporaries with Abū Ja‘fār al-Ṭabarī and belonged to the same “classical period of *tafsīr*.”²⁵⁹ Similarly, Al-Ṭabarī also notes *ūlī ‘l-fiqh wa ‘l-‘ilm*²⁶⁰ as well as the military commanders,²⁶¹ among many other possible interpretations. Furāt gives a distinctly Shī‘a explanation, as the military commander he names is ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, while al-Ṭabarī writes that “the verse was revealed concerning the man whom the Prophet sent into battle” or about ‘Abdallāh ibn Ḥuḍāfah ibn Qays al-Sahmī.²⁶²

²⁵⁶ al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, 109.

²⁵⁷ al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, 108.

²⁵⁸ al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, 109.

²⁵⁹ Rippin, A. “Tafsīr (a.).” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

²⁶⁰ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān / li-Abī Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī; Ḥaqqāqahu wa-‘allaqa ḥawāshīh Muḥammad Muḥammad Shākir. Rāja’ahu wa-kharraja aḥādīthuh Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir*, Vol. 8 ([Cairo]: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, [1374- i.e. 1954-]), 500.

²⁶¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 8, ([Cairo]: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, [1374- i.e. 1954-]), 497.

The exchange of ideas among the early Shī'a commentators is clear, but it is also possible that Furāt and al-Ṭabarī were engaged in exegetical dialogue. Furāt bears some stylistic resemblance to al-Ṭabarī in this instance, who often “begins by reviewing the various traditions associated with a verse. After presenting the reader with all the material, he usually expresses his own opinion as to which is the preferable tradition, [and] rejects the reliability of other traditions or of variant readings.”²⁶³ Furāt provides limited variety in the possible explanations that he lists for the meaning of “those in authority,” and all of the explanations relate either to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his family or at least to sectarian concerns – as in the case where he notes that “*ūlī 'l-fiqh wa 'l-'ilm*” is intended specifically for the Shī'a community.

Twelver Shī'a Tafsīr Under the Buyids

In Baghdad, Ibn Bābawayh “left behind a whole generation of scholars who received his works with critical acclaim and expanded on them.”²⁶⁴ In discussing what he calls the “pre-Buwayhid school of Imāmī exegesis,”²⁶⁵ Bar-Asher notes that his usage of the term “school” does not “imply that the commentators knew one another or derived

²⁶² al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 8, ([Cairo]: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, [1374- i.e. 1954-]), 497.

²⁶³ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 74.

²⁶⁴ Halm, *Shī'ism*, 49.

²⁶⁵ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 19.

their knowledge from the same teachers.”²⁶⁶ While this caveat is necessary for the first wave of Imāmi Shī’a commentators, I would argue that we can talk about a later school of scholars (primarily based in Baghdad) who knew one another and learned from each other.

‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī taught Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī, who taught al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d.413/1020).²⁶⁷ Like his teacher, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd also initially devoted attention to collecting *ḥadīth* of the Imāms.²⁶⁸ However, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd’s commentary on Qur’ān 4:59, a mere two generations of scholars since al-Qummī, reflects an entirely different set of priorities than those apparent in his predecessor’s writing. Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd uses the phrase “those in authority among you” as an opportunity to launch into a defense of the institution of the Imāmate.

Unlike al-Qummī, who defined “those in authority” as “the Commander of the Faithful,” most likely knowing that his audience would interpret “Commander of the Faithful” as ‘Alī, al-Mufīd makes clear that the verse indicates ‘Alī *and* his descendents. Al-Mufīd writes his commentary on Q 4:59 under the heading “Proof of the Imāmate of

²⁶⁶ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 71.

²⁶⁷ Shaykh al-Mufīd’s works include *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd al-mustakhraj min turāth al-Shaykh al-Mufīd* and *al-Amālī*. Halm, *Shī’ism*, 49.

²⁶⁸ In his commentary on Ibn Bābawayh’s work, Mufīd “criticized overemphasis on the transmitted word and [Ibn Bābawayh’s] rejection of reasoning and drawing conclusions in all those instances where tradition had no precedent,” and Mufīd discarded “much traditional material” that failed to hold up to his new criteria to determine the soundness of *ḥadīth*. Halm, *Shī’ism*, 49.

‘Alī” and says: “The obedience of the Imāms is united with the obedience of Him [i.e., God], and it is demonstrated that rebellion against them is as rebellion against Him.”²⁶⁹ Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd neglects to mention the Twelfth (or Absent) Imām, but this omission may be intentional and just as telling as his defense of ‘Alī’s Imāmate. Shaykh al-Mufīd wrote within the first century that followed the Greater Occultation of the Twelfth Imām, during the rule of the nominally Shī’a Buyid princes in Baghdad. The polemical writing that we find in al-Shaykh al-Mufīd’s *tafsīr* represents a break from ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī’s writing, whose commentary on Qur’ān 4:59 does not represent the same urgency in defending the Imāmate of ‘Alī as does al-Shaykh al-Mufīd’s writing.

Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd addresses the challenge from those who dispute ‘Alī’s claim, writing: “if a transgressor says: find for us the text about ‘Alī (peace be upon him) in the Qur’ān, and that the text requires choice in the proof of reason and law, and the disregard for translated *ḥadīth* in the one who is appointed as a successor for prayer [i.e., Abū Bakr], and if it is right, it is not permissible to dispute with it.”²⁷⁰ In other words, the Sunnī polemicists have challenged the Shī’a to find proof text in the Qur’ān that designates ‘Alī and his descendants as Muḥammad’s successors. Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd

²⁶⁹ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Mufīd, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd al-mustakhraj min turāth al-Shaykh al-Mufīd / Muḥammad ‘Alī Āyāzī* (al-Ṭab’ah 1, Qum: Būstān-i Kitāb, 1424 [2003 or 2004]), 154.

²⁷⁰ al-Mufīd, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd*, 155.

responds to Sunnī critics, arguing that it is not necessary for the text of the Qur’ān to make such explicit stipulations.

Al-Mufīd argues that a specific proof text is unnecessary, since Muslims accept that texts about the prophethood of Muḥammad are absent from the Torah and Gospels, just as the Qur’ān fails to instruct on specifics such as the “minimum amount of property that is subject to the *zakāt* tax and the characteristics of prayer and its nature, and the characteristics of fasting and the rituals of the Hajj.”²⁷¹ Al-Mufīd argues that, just as in other instances where details are not specified, “the Imāmate of the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) is established in the text from the Messenger (peace and blessings upon him), even if it was not put down in the clarity of the Qur’ān.”²⁷² In his polemic against the critics of ‘Alī’s descendents, al-Mufīd employs the use of reason, arguing that there is no need for the Qur’ān to specify each detail of instruction. In this defense, al-Mufīd is echoing Furāt and al-‘Ayyāshī, who also argue that the Qur’ān refers to large concepts (such as the Hajj or obedience to authority) and it is up to others to elucidate the details. However, al-Mufīd offers his argument as a stand-alone text, while Furāt and al-‘Ayyāshī attribute the same argument to proof text that they find in *ḥadīth*.

Students of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd: al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā

²⁷¹ al-Mufīd, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd*, 156.

²⁷² al-Mufīd, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd*, 156.

Despite their differences, the commentaries of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā on Qur'ān 4:59 bear a striking resemblance to one another; namely, both authors take the opportunity to discuss the doctrine of *ʿiṣma*, or immunity from sin. Although Shī'a commentators address *ʿiṣma* prior to the Buyid era,²⁷³ this is the first mention of the doctrine that I have seen in relation to this particular Qur'ānic verse. Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā begins his *tafsīr*, writing:

“[And in it are two issues: the first: al-Qāḍī²⁷⁴ said: some of them are guided by this verse] and it is mentioned that the obligation of God Almighty is obedience of Him, it cannot be otherwise unless he is the one who is designated, the sinless, sin is not permitted for him, and the immutability of that confirms that he is the Commander of the Faithful: because there is no doctrine after what we mentioned except for that.

Then he revealed in the incorrectness of this creed, and the discussion over its invalidity and those who say: ‘truly this verse does not indicate designation of the Commander of the Faithful’ and we do not know anyone from among our companions who accepts this, other than Ibn al-Rāwandī²⁷⁵ who, in his book *al-Imām*, draws conclusions that the Imāms must be sinless, designated in their identity, but the verse also does not indicate this meaning, and what its evidence does not achieve is meaningless; as far as what the proof establishes in it is expanded and sufficient, in praise of God and His benevolence, on the basis that the verse, were the verse to indicate the necessity of the sinlessness of the Imāms and their designation, on what Ibn al-Rāwandī depends on, and the account of Ibn al-Rāwandī²⁷⁶ has recited in the beginning of his discussion, there

²⁷³ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 30.

²⁷⁴ I am unsure whether this is a reference to a specific person or to an unnamed judge.

²⁷⁵ Kraus, P. "Ibn al-Rāwandī or al-Rēwendī, Abu 'l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Ishāk." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-3334). Harvard University. 29 September 2011 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-3334>

is no indicator of this being a designation for ‘Alī’s ²⁷⁷ Imāmate,²⁷⁸ but reference had in that matter to the method of considering consensus, and contemplate²⁷⁹ the differing doctrines of the community [*umma*] concerning the Imāmate, and the truth does not escape from the community [*umma*] according to what we have organized in what preceded, and how is it appropriate to make an argument for designation and then speak for all the proofs of it? This would require the existence of all things that indicate or a rational argument for the necessity of the sinlessness of the imāms, but the text indicates to them the designation of ‘Alī,²⁸⁰ and after that it is clear.²⁸¹

Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā addresses Ibn al-Rāwandī’s argument that the sinlessness of the Imāms must be established prior to their designation as the Imāms, which is in contrast to the mainstream Twelver view (and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā’s opinion) that the designation of the Imāms must be established before their sinlessness.

Like al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d.460/1067) discusses the doctrine of immunity from sin. Al-Ṭūsī writes “it is not permitted to consent to obey anyone absolutely unless he is infallible (*ma’sūman*), protected from negligence and error, and that is not something that pertains to all of the commanders, or the

²⁷⁶ The Arabic is “sāhib al-kitāb,” which I have taken to mean “the author of the book,” i.e., Ibn al-Rawandī.

²⁷⁷ Literally, “*amīr al-mu’minīn*” or “Commander of the Faithful.”

²⁷⁸ ‘Alam al-Hudá ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *Tafsīr al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā: al-musammá bi-Nafā’is al-ta’wīl / al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā; ishrāf Mujtabá Aḥmad al-Mūsawī*, Vol. 2 (al-Ṭab’ah 1, Bayrūt: Sharikat al-A’lamī lil-Maṭbū’āt, 2010), 80.

²⁷⁹ The Arabic “*ta’mīm*” or “contemplate” is given in the imperative form.

²⁸⁰ Literally, “*amīr al-mu’minīn*” or “Commander of the Faithful.”

²⁸¹ al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *Tafsīr al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā*, Vol. 2, 81.

‘*ulamā*’, and it is, in fact, obligatory among the imāms that those whom the proofs for their sinlessness and purity have been demonstrated, and as for those who have said that the meaning is the ‘*ulamā*’, the claim of one who says so is far-fetched.”²⁸² Through exegetes like al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, we see the development of the doctrine of *‘iṣma*, as well as a refusal to move away from accepting the authority of the Imām to recognizing the de facto authority of any other party – despite the absence of the Imām.

Al-Ṭūsī addresses the meaning of the phrase “those in authority,”²⁸³ writing:

“There are two interpretations in it for the commentators: one of the two of them – Abū Hurayrah said, in his transmission on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās,²⁸⁴ and Maymūn ibn Mihrān,²⁸⁵ and al-Sadī, and al-Jubbā’ī,²⁸⁶ al-Balkhī,²⁸⁷ and al-

²⁸² Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān / ta’līf Abī Ja’far Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, qaddama lahu Aghā Buzruk al-Ṭihriyānī*, Vol. 3 (al-Najaf: al-Maṭba’ah al-‘Ilmīyah, 1957-63), 236.

²⁸³ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 3, 236.

²⁸⁴ Veccia Vaglieri, L. “‘Abd Allāh b. al-‘Abbās.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-0035). Harvard University. 24 September 2011
<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-0035>

²⁸⁵ Donner, F.M. “Maymūn b. Mihrān, Abū Ayyūb.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-5074). Harvard University. 24 September 2011
<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-5074>

²⁸⁶ Gardet, L. “al-Djubbā’ī, Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-2101). Harvard University. 24 September 2011
<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-2101>

Ṭabarī:²⁸⁸ they are the commanders(*al-umarā*). The second – Jābbar ibn ‘Abd Allah said, and in another narrative given on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, and Mujāhid,²⁸⁹ and al-Ḥassan, and ‘Aṭā’, and Abū al-‘Alīyah:²⁹⁰ truly they are the scholars (*‘ulamā*).²⁹¹ And our companions narrated on the authority of Abū Ja‘far and Abū ‘Abd Allah that they were the imāms from the family of Muḥammad (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) and as such God Almighty enjoined absolute obedience to them, as God enjoined obedience to His Messenger and obedience to Himself similarly.”²⁹²

²⁸⁷ I have not determined whether this is a reference to the Mu‘tazili Abu’l-Ḳāsim al-Ka‘bī al-Balkhī (d. 319/931) or to the Twelver Shī‘a Abū Zayd Aḥmad b. Sahl al-Balkhī (d. 322/934).

Nader, A.N. "al-Balkhī, Abū’l-Ḳāsim (‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Maḥmūd)." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-1156). Harvard University. 24 September 2011
<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-1156>

Dunlop, D.M. "al-Balkhī, Abū Zayd Aḥmad b. Sahl." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-1157). Harvard University. 24 September 2011
<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-1157>

²⁸⁸ Bosworth, C.E. "al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ḍjafar Muḥammad b. Ḍjarīr b. Yazīd." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-1133). Harvard University. 24 September 2011
<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-1133>

²⁸⁹ Rippin, A. "Mudjāhidb.ḌJabral- Makkī, Abū I-Ḥadjdjādj." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-5306). Harvard University. 25 September 2011
<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-5306>

²⁹⁰ Blachère, R. "Abu’l-‘ĀliyaRufay‘ b. Mihrān al-Riyāhī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. [Brill Online](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-0154). Harvard University. 25 September 2011
<http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-0154>

²⁹¹ The Arabic term used for “scholars” is “*al-‘ulamā*’.”

²⁹² The Arabic term used for “commanders” is “*al-umarā*’.”

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī is in dialogue with commentators from outside of the Twelver Shī'a tradition, in a way that the other Shī'a commentators of Baghdad (even al-Mufīd, who rhetorically acknowledges arguments against the Imāmate) are not.

Depending on the doctrine of immunity from sin, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī concerns himself with disproving the two views of the exegetes he cites; the first, that “those in authority” are the military commanders (*al-umarā'*), and the second, that they are the scholars (*'ulamā'*). He writes that infallibility is “not something that pertains to all of the commanders, or the scholars,”²⁹³ which means that the commanders and scholars must be excluded from “those in authority.” Similarly, al-Ṭūsī uses this verse to polemicize against the concept of consensus, writing “And a group has inferred from this verse that consensus is a proof, by virtue of what they have said: “truly God enjoined the reference to the Book and the Sunna on the condition of the presence of the dispute, and showed that if there was no dispute, it was not necessary to refer it.”²⁹⁴ Al-Ṭūsī argues that consensus is not a valid doctrine, as this verse presupposes that there are disputes within the community.

Activism and Quietism in the Works of al-Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī

²⁹³ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 3, 236.

²⁹⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 3, 237.

The dichotomy between activism and quietism – within the Twelver Shī'a context – is often understood as the differentiation between those who advocate for armed rebellion against illegitimate authorities and those who do not. However, this understanding is perhaps too simple, and it deserves further interrogation. In their Qur'ānic exegesis, the classical Shī'a commentators exhort their readers not to obey anyone unless he is sinless. Even if this disobedience does not reach the level of open and armed rebellion, it is difficult to consider it a call on behalf of quietism. Perhaps what we are seeing is an activist/quietist spectrum, rather than a dichotomy.

There seems to be greater evidence of a quietist strain throughout the non-exegetical writings of Murtaḍā and al-Ṭūsī, even though their *tafsīr* seem to encourage disobedience. The tensions between activism and quietism within various works by the same authors reveal that the authors land on different points on the activist/quietist spectrum, perhaps depending on the genre in which (and, perhaps, depending on the time during which) they were writing. In Michael Cook's *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, he does not make a distinction between the phrase "commanding right" and the phrase "forbidding wrong;" rather, he uses the clause "forbidding wrong" as a stand-in to signify both clauses.²⁹⁵ However, there are differences between these two formulations that are worth noting, as the negative clause

²⁹⁵ Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xii.

– “forbidding wrong” – implies the prevention of, for our discussion, illegitimate rule, and is therefore of greater interest to us.

Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā mentions the principle of commanding right and forbidding wrong in his *Treatise on the Legality of Working for the Government*, writing that “it is obligatory if the one accepting office knows, or considers it likely on the basis of clear indications, that he will through the tenure of the office be enabled to support a right and to reject a false claim or to order what is proper and to forbid what is reprehensible.”²⁹⁶ Madelung notes that this principle takes center stage even more in al-Ṭūsī’s writings, saying that “while al-Murtaḍā left his concept of ‘the rightful and just ruler’ undefined, al-Ṭūsī describes him as the one who ‘orders what is proper, forbids what is reprehensible, and places things in their places.’”²⁹⁷

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā discuss their views on illegitimate rulers outside of their Qur’ānic commentaries. In his *Treatise on the Legality of Working for the Government*, Murtaḍā seems to have viewed political involvement as a means by which it is possible to influence the government subtly towards the good. Murtaḍā writes that an individual’s “holding office thus does not lead him into anything which would not have been necessary for him if he had not accepted the office, while through the office

²⁹⁶ Madelung, “A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā,” 25.

²⁹⁷ Madelung, “A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā,” 30.

he is enabled to order what is proper and to prohibit what is reprehensible."²⁹⁸ Madelung distinguishes between Murtaḍā's views and Ṭūsī's writings on the issue of working for an unjust government, explaining that Ṭūsī "implicitly placed acceptance of the office under such circumstances in the category of reprehensible (*makruḥ*) but not forbidden (*ḥaram*), while Murtaḍā had regarded acceptance or non-acceptance as equally permissible."²⁹⁹ Similarly, "if someone knows or considers it likely that he will be able to 'order what is proper and forbid what is reprehensible,' his taking the office is merely desirable (*yustaḥabb*) according to al-Ṭūsī, not obligatory (*wājib*), as al-Murtaḍā had maintained."³⁰⁰

In al-Ṭūsī's *al-Nihayah*, he writes that "nobody is allowed to implement or enforce the law of punishment on his own and without proper procedure, [except for] the legitimate ruling authority (*'ilā li-sulṭān al-zamān*) with divine power (*al-manṣūb min qibali Allāhi ta'ālā*), or whoever is appointed by the Imām allowed to do this."³⁰¹³⁰² Although al-Ṭūsī seems to take a harder line than al-Murtaḍā concerning illegitimate government, al-

²⁹⁸ Madelung, "A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā," 27.

²⁹⁹ Madelung, "A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā," 30-1.

³⁰⁰ Madelung, "A Treatise of the Sharīf al-Murtaḍā," 30.

³⁰¹ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Nihāyah fi Mojarrad* [sic] *al-Fiqh wa al-Fatāwā*, trans. A. Ezzati (Lahore: Classic, 2005), 326.

³⁰² al-Ṭūsī, *al-Nihāyah fi mujarrad al-fiqh wa-al-fatāwā*, 300.

Ṭūsī's writing in *al-Nihayah* is perhaps still more nuanced than his injunction in his *tafsīr* against obeying any authority that is not sinless. Al-Ṭūsī writes in *al-Nihayah*:

whoever is appointed as the representative of a tyrannical ruler and is given the authority to implement punishments for doing wrong is allowed to do it properly and implement them perfectly, but with the intention of doing it with the permission of the right and legitimate authority and for the illegitimate authority.³⁰³

Intriguingly, al-Ṭūsī later adds that “he who is appointed by an illegitimate authority to work in enforcing the law and implementing punishment, must regard himself as being appointed by the legitimate authority and must fulfill the responsibility according to the law of the school of his faith (Shi’ite).”³⁰⁴ In this text, al-Ṭūsī seems to regard interaction with the illegitimate authority as inevitable, if not even seeing that authority as a necessary evil. Both al-Ṭūsī's treatment of illegitimate authority in *al-Nihayah* and Murtaḍā's *Treatise* are far more pragmatic than the premium that both authors put on sinlessness in their respective *tafāsīr*, bolstering the argument that *tafsīr* would have been a more privileged genre, written with less anxiety about potential censorship and aimed at a like-minded audience.

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³⁰³ al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Nihāyah fi Mojarrad* [sic], trans. A. Ezzati, 327.

³⁰⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Nihāyah fi Mojarrad* [sic], trans. A. Ezzati, 328. (The word “Shi’ite” does not appear in al-Ṭūsī's text).

Abū ‘Alī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī’s (d. 548/1154) commentary on Qur’ān 4:59 bears a strong resemblance to the commentary of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī on the same passage. However, there are some differences that are worth noting, especially in light of the question of whether exegetes such as al-Ṭabrisī merely copied the work of al-Ṭūsī. Both commentators note the intended audience of the verse; al-Ṭūsī writing that it is “from God Almighty to the believers,”³⁰⁵ and al-Ṭabrisī elaborating that “the address is generally to each one who has accepted a religious obligation of the obligations of God which are His commands and His prohibitions and the obligations of His servants through which they entrust each other.”³⁰⁶ Like al-Ṭūsī, al-Ṭabrisī uses the verse as an opportunity to state that “God does not command us – mighty is His name – in obeying anyone who disobeys Him,”³⁰⁷ i.e., obedience of an unjust ruler is not commanded.

This justification of rule reads counter to the emphasis, seen often in Sunnī political theory, on the necessity of a ruler – just or unjust – whose reign exists to prevent society’s descent into chaos, and whose authority justifies itself through its own existence. We see an example of this type of Sunnī political theory as early as the letter

³⁰⁵ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 3, 235.

³⁰⁶ al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma’ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān / ta’līf Abī ‘Alī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī; waḍa’a ḥawāshīhi wa-kharraja āyātahu wa-shawāhidahu Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn*, Vol. 1 (al-Ṭab’ah 1, Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 1997), 264.

³⁰⁷ al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma’ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 1, 265.

of the Umayyad caliph, al-Walīd II, which explains that “through obedience the successful attain their stations from God and gain a right to reward from Him; and through disobedience others obtain those of His punishments which He metes out to them, that chastisement of His which He inflicts upon them, and that anger of His which he causes to befall them.”³⁰⁸ In this view, authority is the reward of successful leadership, and power is justified in primarily temporal terms.

It is perfectly logical that those who hold the reigns of temporal power should seek to legitimize their authority with the “might is right” argument, while the disenfranchised exegetes should emphasize the inherent religious aspects (such as divine designation and sinlessness) of those whom they would consent to obey. The writings of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabrisī reveal great concern with telling their readers whom *not* to obey, since their role was not to exhort allegiance to any living authority but rather, perhaps, to caution against loyalty to illegitimate rulers.

Patricia Crone notes that some modern scholars have “suggested that the Imāmīs repaid the Buyids by accepting the concept of a just ruler who was not the imām,”³⁰⁹ and that a compilation of ‘Alī’s sayings (from around 1000) credited him with

³⁰⁸ Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 121.

³⁰⁹ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 120.

the view that "government... is indispensable, whether pious or profligate."³¹⁰ However, Crone argues that, despite Buyid tolerance for the Shī'a community, the Shī'a still considered Buyid power to be "profane," and not "in the neutral sense of 'secular' or 'not sacred.'"³¹¹ Even the Buyids themselves did not attempt to justify their rule in religious terms. Instead, by calling themselves *Shāhānshāh*, or "king of kings," the Buyids invoked vocabulary that was both temporal and pre-Islamic to legitimate their authority.³¹² Both al-Ṭūsī (writing under the Buyids) and al-Ṭabrisī (writing under the Seljuqs) express the same view on the importance of not obeying a government simply because it exists. Rather, the qualifications of the ruler (especially his immunity from sin) seem to be of tantamount importance.

Conclusions

What is perhaps most striking about the medieval interpretations of the phrase "those in authority among you" is that they fail to mention the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām. So the question remains: if the Imām was no longer present, why do the commentators write that the meaning of *ūlī 'l-amr*, or "those in authority," is the line of imāms? The clue, in this instance, seems to be that the exegetes put as much emphasis

³¹⁰ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 121.

³¹¹ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 120.

³¹² Wilferd Madelung, "The Assumption of the Title *Shāhānshāh* by the Būyids and 'The Reign of the Daylam (Dawlat Al-Daylam)," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Apr., 1969), 89.

on the prohibition against obeying those who are not sinless as they place on the interpretation that the phrase “those in authority among you” refers to the imāms. Although al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, and al-Ṭabrisī discuss the imāmate, their primary aim appears to be preventing their readers from obeying anyone *other than* the imām. The willingness of these three exegetes to put such a politically bold injunction in writing implies that they perceived the genre of *tafsīr* to be safe – far from the censorship of the temporal authorities.

CHAPTER FOUR

Interpretations of *Ayāt al-khums*: The Political Implications of Early Twelver Shī'a Commentary

The Khums Verse

There are many issues at stake in the forty-first verse of the eighth Qur'ānic Sūra, *Sūrat al-Anfāl*, which reads "Know that whatever you acquire as material gain, a fifth belongs to God and to the Prophet and to those related and the orphans and the poor and the wayfarers." The concerns that the commentators address include the very definitions of *ghanīma* and *khums*, as well as opinions on the proper way to divide *khums*, the groups of people included in the phrase "those related," and how to handle the portions allocated to God and to Muḥammad. This chapter will examine what these opinions tell us about the values and commitments of their authors, and it will address the differences between exegetical and non-exegetical works that deal with *khums*.

Roy Mottahedeh lists the various disagreements between exegetes over the ideas contained in Qur'ān 8:41. First, there are several possible meanings of the terms *ghanīma* and *fay'*: 1) "the *ghanīma* and *fay'* are the same," and *Sūrat al-Anfāl* abrogates *Sūrat al-Hashr*, 2) "*ghanīma* is booty taken by force, whereas property taken treaty is *fay'*", and 3) "*ghanīma* represents the moveable property (*māl*) of the nonbelievers and

fay' represents their landed property."³¹³ Secondly, the commentators differ over the phrase "belongs to God," with some arguing that it is "a prologue to the five categories of people mentioned subsequently," while others say that "the portion belonging to God is a separate sixth category and should be given to the Ka'ba."³¹⁴ The opinions concerning Muḥammad's share after his death include that it 1) goes to the caliphs, 2) goes to the Prophet's kin group, 3) is added to the four remaining categories, and 4) should be used for all Muslims.³¹⁵ Finally, the commentators address the question of what is meant by "those related," offering 1) the Banū Hāshim, 2) the Banū Hāshim and the Banū Muṭṭalib, and 3) the "entirety of the Quraysh" as possible explanations.³¹⁶

Abdulaziz Sachedina notes the historical precedent established in the pre-Islamic era for a tax paid to the chiefs on war spoils, writing that "the origins of *khums* go back to the pre-Islamic Arab custom wherein the chief was entitled to one fifth of the *ghanīma* (booty) in addition to the *ṣafw al-māl* (the portion of the booty which especially attracted him). The remainder of the booty was normally divided among the raiders who had accompanied the chief, but the latter reserved the right to dispose of the *ghanīma* as he

³¹³ Roy P. Mottahedeh, "Qur'ānic Commentary on the Verse of the Khums (al-Anfāl VIII: 41)" in *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: The Living Links to the Prophet*, ed. Kazuo Morimoto, 92-125 (New York: Routledge, 2012), 94-6.

³¹⁴ Mottahedeh, "Qur'ānic Commentary on the Verse of the Khums (al-Anfāl VIII: 41)," 94-6.

³¹⁵ Mottahedeh, "Qur'ānic Commentary on the Verse of the Khums (al-Anfāl VIII: 41)," 94-6.

³¹⁶ Mottahedeh, "Qur'ānic Commentary on the Verse of the Khums (al-Anfāl VIII: 41)," 94-6.

chose.”³¹⁷ Within the Twelver tradition, the line of imāms – as members of the family of Muḥammad – were prohibited from receiving *ṣadaqa* (charity), and for whom “the revenue from the *khums* seems to have been a significant source of income.”³¹⁸ In addition to the many disparities in the different interpretations of this verse, the Shīʿī allocation of the *khums* tax to the imāms – rather than to the caliphs – could lead to tensions, as states often try to protect their monopolies on taxation.³¹⁹

Although the tensions between imām and caliph certainly merit attention, this chapter will focus on how the exegetes interpreted the allocation of the Imām’s share following the Greater Occultation in 939 CE. Heinz Halm notes that “it would not only be impracticable to hoard [the Imām’s share] until his return but to do so would hardly be beneficial for Islam. In the Ḥilla school the opinion was becoming generally accepted that the legal scholars, as the collective representative of the Imām, should raise this income tax from the believers and use it for the general good of the Shiʿite community. This principle only attained practical significance, however, from the time of the Ṣafavids with

³¹⁷ Abdulaziz Sachedina, “The Fifth in the Imāmī Shīʿī Legal System,” in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct., 1980): 277.

³¹⁸ Sachedina, “The Fifth in the Imāmī Shīʿī Legal System,” 276.

³¹⁹ For example, Sachedina notes that “Hārūn al-Rashīd was informed about the *khums* which Mūsā b. Jaʿfar (d. 799-800), the seventh Imāmī imām, received in Madīna, and Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī asserts that this was one of the factors which led to the imprisonment of this imām by the caliph. Sachedina, “The Fifth in the Imāmī Shīʿī Legal System,” 276-7.

the formation of the Iranian clergy.”³²⁰ The era under examination in this dissertation predates the establishment of the Ḥilla school,³²¹ and is focused on the Baghdad school. The exegesis considered in this chapter does not show evidence of having moved to the opinion that the legal scholars are to act in place of the absent imām in distributing the *khums* tax; rather, the exegetical material (although not other works by the same authors) avoids all mention of both the Occultation and the need to come up with a substitute system during the Imām’s absence.

The Earliest Extant Shī’a Commentary

‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. ca. 307/919-20),³²² is one of the earliest Shī’a exegetes whose *tafsīr* survives. Al-Qummī writes:

there are three portions for the Imām out of six. Three portions for the orphans of the family of the Messenger and their poor and their wayfarers, and three portions of the *khums* are for the Imām himself³²³ because God makes it incumbent upon him, as He made it incumbent upon the Prophet, to foster the orphan and to help the Muslims settle their debts and bring them to the *ḥajj* and the *jihād*... and [the Prophet] is a father to them, wherefore God made him father to the Muslims, requiring of him what is required of the father to the son... and

³²⁰ Halm, *Shī’ism*, 101.

³²¹ Halm notes that the Ḥilla school is typified by scholars such as al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī. Halm, *Shī’ism*, 100.

³²² Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism*, 28.

³²³ al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Vol. 1, 304.

what is required of the Imām is what is required of the Prophet and for that reason three portions of the *khums* fall to him.³²⁴

Al-Qummī perhaps sets the precedent that we will continue to see among the Twelver commentators, in which the first three shares are for the Imām, and the following three shares are distributed to the orphan, the poor, and the wayfarer.³²⁵

Two other early commentators – whose commentary on the question of authority mirrored each other far more closely – are Furāt ibn Furāt al-Kūfī (d. ca. 310/922) and Abū al-Naḍr Muḥammad ibn Mas‘ūd ‘Ayyāshī (d. ca. 320/932). Rather than addressing the more common questions about the allocations of the *khums* portions, Furāt ibn Furāt uses this verse as an opportunity to prove that the family of Muḥammad – and its primacy – is, in fact, mentioned in the text of the Qur’ān. As we have seen in Chapter One, the pro-‘Alid exegetes were continually challenged to explain why ‘Alī and his descendants were not designated by name in the Qur’ān, and much of their commentary on Qur’ān 4:59 seemed to anticipate and address this question. Merely the mention in Qur’ān 8:41 of “*dhī al-qurba*” provides enough fodder for Furāt ibn Furāt’s commentary

³²⁴ al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Vol. 1, 305. Mottahedeh, “Qur’ānic Commentary on the Verse of the Khums (al-Anfāl VIII: 41),” 102.

³²⁵ Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā will make a somewhat similar argument, in which three portions go to the Imām, and two portions go to Muḥammad (which will then be distributed to the Imām after Muḥammad’s lifetime). Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī differs slightly – although perhaps more in language than in substance – as he writes that one portion is for God, one is for Muḥammad, and one is for the *qā’im maqām* of the Prophet (i.e., the Imām left in place of the Prophet), who spends it on himself and on “those related,” (i.e., the Banū Hāshim). In practice, for al-Ṭūsī, all of the first three portions will be given to the Imām.

on this verse – as well as the rhetorical victory of the pro-‘Alid camp in the related disputation – as it supports the argument that ‘Alī and his descendents are specified in the Qur’ān.

Furāt ibn Furāt narrates a tradition in which a shaykh from the people of the Shām³²⁶ said to ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn: “praise be to God who has killed you all and cut off the period of *fitna*.”³²⁷ ‘Alī asks whether the shaykh has read the Qur’ān, and the shaykh answers in the affirmative. ‘Alī then asks whether he has found us, i.e., the Prophet’s family, “especially out of all the Muslims.” When the shaykh responds with a no, ‘Alī asks whether he has not read the “*anfāl*,” i.e., the verse, and proceeds to quote it, saying “we are they.” Finally, the shaykh raises his hand and says “I repent to you for the killing of the family of Muḥammad.”³²⁸ Whether mention of *sūrat al-anfāl* and the phrase “those related” was enough to turn the heart of an unnamed Syrian shaykh is entirely beside the point. In the commentary of Furāt ibn Furāt, the significance of this particular verse goes far beyond the mundane discussion of *khums* portions, as it justifies the very existence and legitimacy of the family of the Prophet.

Abū al-Naḍr Muḥammad ibn Mas‘ūd ‘Ayyāshī’s commentary on Qur’ān 8:41 contains a series of *ḥadīth* that touch on many of the issues at stake in this particular

³²⁶ Syria.

³²⁷ al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, Vol. 1, 153.

³²⁸ al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, Vol. 1, 154.

verse. First, we begin to see a spectrum of opinions on the distribution of the *khums* tax; al-‘Ayyāshī cites a tradition, on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Muslim, that states that even the poor, the orphan, and the wayfarer must be from among those related to the Messenger of God.³²⁹ This theme is mentioned again in several more of the *ḥadīth*; for example, al-‘Ayyāshī cites Minhāl ibn ‘Umar, on the authority of ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn, as saying that the portion is “for our orphan, and our wretched, and our wayfarer.”³³⁰ Additionally, al-‘Ayyāshī mentions Zakariyā ibn Mālīk al-Ju‘fī, who narrated on the authority of Abū ‘Abdallāh that “the orphans are the orphans of the Family of the Prophet (*‘Ahl al-Bayt*).”³³¹ Interestingly, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d.460/1067) includes this particular *ḥadīth* in his collection, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, which is considered one of the four canonical books of Twelver Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*, while most of the *ḥadīth* cited by al-‘Ayyāshī in his commentary on this verse do not enter the Twelver canon until their inclusion in *Biḥār al-anwār* (compiled by Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, 1038/1627-1111/1700)³³² and *Wasā’il al-Shī’a* (compiled by Muḥammad al-Ḥurr al-‘Amīlī, d. 1104/1692).³³³ At the other

³²⁹ al-‘Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 2, 199.

³³⁰ al-‘Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 2, 201.

³³¹ al-‘Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 2, 202.

³³² Halm, *Shī‘ism*, 93.

³³³ Halm, *Shī‘ism*, 128.

end of the spectrum, we will see commentaries by non-Shīʿī exegetes³³⁴ who assert that Muḥammad’s portion after his death and the portion of “those related” must be given to the poor among all the Muslims – rather than reserved for Muḥammad’s family.

Sachedina notes that the view of the Imām as possessor of everything in the world can be traced back to al-Kulaynī’s *al-Kāfī*, in which he writes that “jungles, mines, oceans, and deserts belong to the imām, in particular,”³³⁵ and Sachedina argues that “al-Kulaynī’s exposition lays the groundwork for the specific interpretation of the Imāmī jurists concerning the injunction about the *khums*. Everything on earth is the sole property of the imām.”³³⁶ Sachedina cites this statement to al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī’s *ḥadīth* collection, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*. However, al-ʿAyyāshī writes a nearly identical statement in his *tafsīr*, in response to the question “what is the rightful possession of the Imām in the properties of the people?” saying “the *anfāl* and the *khums*, and all that comes from *fayʾ*’ or *anfāl* or *khums* or *ghanīma*, for truly the *khums* is for them, as God said ‘Know that whatever you acquire as material gain, a fifth is for God and for the Messenger and those related and the orphan and the wretched,’ and everything in the world is truly for

³³⁴ As will be discussed later in this chapter, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī quotes Abū Ḥanīfa as saying, “As for after the death of the Messenger of God, peace and blessing upon him, his portion is stopped because of his death, and as such the portion of those related, and these are given to the poor among them, and they follow the pattern of what remains for the poor, and it is not given to the wealthy among them but apportioned to the orphan and the poor and the wayfarer.”

³³⁵ Sachedina, “The Fifth in the Imāmī Shīʿī Legal System,” 283.

³³⁶ Sachedina, “The Fifth in the Imāmī Shīʿī Legal System,” 284.

them [i.e., the imāms].”³³⁷ The modern editor of al-‘Ayyāshī’s work notes that this is a *ḥadīth* that is later cited in both *Biḥār al-anwār* and *Wasā’il al-Shī’a*. Roy Mottahedeh writes that al-‘Ayyāshī’s view is an anticipation of the “later Twelver Shī’ī position in that he believes the Imām has a claim to the *khums* over everything classified as *fay’* (immoveable property) and *anfāl* (booty)... [but] mentions a contrary *ḥadīth* to the effect that *khums* is payable only on booty (*ghanā’im*).”³³⁸

Al-‘Ayyāshī narrates a tradition that refers, intriguingly, to determining the share of the sultan. Al-‘Ayyāshī writes that Ibrahīm ibn Muḥammad wrote to Abū ‘l-Ḥassan al-Thālith, who responded saying, “I supervised our companions, and they said, ‘the provisions are after what the sultan takes, and after the provisions of the people.’” Ibrahīm ibn Muḥammad wrote back, saying, “Have you not said: ‘the *khums* is after the provisions, and our companions have disagreed about the provisions?’” Abū ‘l-Ḥassan al-Thālith responded, “the *khums* is after what the sultan takes,”³³⁹ and the mention of a sultan appears to be a nod to temporal power. This is yet another tradition from al-‘Ayyāshī that, failing to make it into al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī’s four canonical *ḥadīth* collections, reappears instead in Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī’s *Biḥār al-anwār*. Not wishing to draw conclusions based on too little evidence, we may tentatively suggest that this example

³³⁷ al-‘Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 2, 199.

³³⁸ Mottahedeh, “Qur’ānic Commentary on the Verse of the Khums (al-Anfāl VIII: 41),” 101.

³³⁹ al-‘Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, 201.

hints at al-Ṭūsī's reluctance to acknowledge non-religious authorities in his pietistic writings (especially *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*), whereas later scholars perhaps reached more of an accommodation with the temporal powers of their day.

Towards the end of al-'Ayyāshī's exegesis on this verse, he cites a narration in which Ja'far ibn Muḥammad said, "truly there is no God except for Him, He forbade for us the *ṣadaqa* and revealed for us the *khums*, and the *ṣadaqa* is forbidden to us and the *khums* is an ordinance [of God] (*farīḍa*) for us, and the honor (*al-karāma*) is an order (*'amr*) that is permitted to us."³⁴⁰ The question of the prohibition of the family of Muḥammad from receiving *ṣadaqa* will merit a great deal of attention in the commentaries that this chapter addresses subsequently. The Twelver exegetes seem to use the prohibition as a proof text to justify the imāms' receipt of the *khums*, which, as previously noted, could be a significant source of income.

Shī'a Commentary Under the Buyids

One of the more interesting aspects of the argument in favor of the Banū Hāshim is that they are entitled to a portion of the *khums* because they are prohibited from receiving *ṣadaqa*. Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d.1022) writes "And the obligatory *zakāt* is forbidden to the Banū Hāshim in entirety from the son of the Commander of the Faithful,

³⁴⁰ al-'Ayyāshī, *al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 2, 202.

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (peace be upon him), Ja‘far, and ‘Aqīl, and al-‘Abbās, if they were established in their right to the *khums* from the *ghanīma* towards what the Qur’ān articulates in it and what it prevents, and if they are in need of the *ṣadaqa*, the *zakāt* will be released for them.”³⁴¹

Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd does not mention the Imām in his commentary on the verse,³⁴² but al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā argues that “after the provisions and what is sufficient in the year for saving and singling out for his family, he distributes out six portions: three of them to the *imām al-qā’im* at the rank of the Messenger (peace and blessings upon him)... And the second portion that is mentioned additionally is for the Messenger in clear language, and these two portions together are for the Messenger in his life and for his successor (*al-khalīfatū’ l-qā’im*) at his rank after him.”³⁴³

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d.1067) is concerned with determining who is included in the term “those related,” and he only mentions the Imām briefly.³⁴⁴ Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī does not devote much discussion in his commentary on the *khums* verse to the Imām, saying:

[A]ccording to our people the property of the *fay’* is for the Imām specifically, who divides it among those whom he chooses and retains in provisioning for himself, and those related and the orphan and the poor and the wayfarer from the family of the Messenger of God, and no one else has any part of it. And as for the

³⁴¹ al-Mufīd, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd*, 230-1.

³⁴² al-Mufīd, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd*, 230-1.

³⁴³ al-Murtaḍā, *Tafsīr al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā*, Vol. 2, 394.

³⁴⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 5, 143.

khums of the *ghanīma*, it is divided – according to us – into six portions: a portion for God, and a portion for His Messenger the Prophet, and these two portions are with the portion of those related, for the *qā'im maqām* of the prophet,³⁴⁵ who spends it on himself and the members of his family from the Banū Hāshim. And a portion³⁴⁶ is for the orphan, and a portion is for the poor, and a portion is for the wayfarer from the family of the Prophet, and the rest of the people do not share in [the portion] with [the *ahl al-bayt*] because God Almighty has compensated them that by what is allowed to the poor of the Muslims and their wretched and their wayfarers of *ṣadaqa*, which is forbidden to the family of the Prophet.³⁴⁷

Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī begins his discussion of the distribution of *khums* in the *Nihāya* in a similar manner to his *tafsīr*, although rather than mentioning *ṣadaqa* as a source of support for those who are not Banū Hāshim, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī writes that “the Imām must distribute their share on the basis of their annual needs and expenses. Whatever is left belongs to the Imām, but if their share does not meet their needs, the Imām must provide, out of his own share, what is needed.” Interestingly, in his *Nihāya*, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī writes that those who are eligible to receive a share of the *khums* are prohibited from receiving *zakāt*.³⁴⁸

However, the most significant difference between al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's *tafsīr* and his *Nihāya* seems to be his discussion of the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām. Like the other exegetes discussed here, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī neglects the Occultation entirely in his

³⁴⁵ i.e., the imām in place of the Prophet.

³⁴⁶ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, Vol. 5, 143.

³⁴⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, Vol. 5, 144.

³⁴⁸ al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Nihāyah fī Mojarrad* [sic], trans. A. Ezzati, 231.

commentary on *ayāt al-khums*. However, the *ghayba* is discussed at some length in al-Ṭūsī's *Nihāya*. After discussing the distribution of the *ghanīmah*, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī notes that this is only in the “circumstance of the visibility (*fī hāli ẓuhūr il-imām*) of the Imām,” after which al-Ṭūsī turns to a discussion of the “circumstance of the *ghayba*.”³⁴⁹ As for what course of action to take during the Occultation,³⁵⁰ al-Ṭūsī writes:

Another group have suggested that the *khums* on treasures and similar things must be divided into six portions and distributed as follows: the three portions that belong to the Imām must be buried or left in the trust and custody of a trustworthy person. The other three portions must be given to rightful eligible recipients of *khums* who are the orphans of the descendents of the Prophet, those of them who are needy and those of them who are wayfarers. This suggestion should be put into practice because the eligible recipients of these three portions are available although the Imām, who is responsible for their distribution, is in occultation, as is the case with *zakāt*, the eligible recipients of which are known and present, although its distributor, the Imām, is in occultation.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Nihāyah fī mujarrad al-fiqh wa-al-fatāwā*, 200.

³⁵⁰ Norman Calder writes: “Ṭūsī was uncertain about what should be done with *khums* during the *ghayba* and pointed to the absence of a specific revealed text on this matter. He suggested four possibilities. 1. All goods are to be considered in the same way as *masākin*, *matāhir*, etc. That is, a waiving of *khums* completely in view of the recorded dispensation... 2. *Khums* is to be preserved as long as the donor is alive; when death approaches he should appoint as *waṣī* over the goods a reliable member of the Imāmī fraternity... and so on until the goods may be delivered to the *imām*. 3. *Khums* should be buried because the earth will disgorge what is in it on the advent of the *imām*. 4. *Khums* should be divided into six parts; the three parts belonging to the *imām* should be buried (= option 3) or consigned as *wadīʿā* to someone trustworthy (= option 2). The other three parts should be distributed to the appropriate recipients. Ṭūsī then indicated very firmly his preference for option 4.” Norman Calder, “Khums in Imāmī Shīʿī Jurisprudence, from the Tenth to the Sixteenth Century A.D.,” in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 45, No. 1 (1982): 40.

³⁵¹ al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Nihāyah fī Mojarrad* [sic], trans. A. Ezzati, 233.

Even though the option of burying the Imām's share during Occultation does not seem particularly pragmatic, al-Ṭūsī notes that it can be buried *or* left in trust, making far more so than the suggestion of other scholars whom al-Ṭūsī credits with the opinion that the Imām's portion must simply be buried until his return. And al-Ṭūsī's willingness to discuss the Occultation openly in the *Nihāya* is clearly a departure from his treatment of the Imām – as a living and present being – in his *tafsīr*.

Abdulaziz Sachedina notes that, in al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's *Kitāb al-ghayba*, he is even more explicit about the necessity of paying the *khums* tax, "during the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām to the righteous (*al-ādil*) *mujtahid*, who is considered to be the indirect representative of the Hidden Imām."³⁵² However, also citing al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's *Kitāb al-ghayba*, Jassim Hussain discusses the importance of no longer collecting the *khums* tax after "the last pronouncement of the twelfth Imām proclaimed the end of direct communication with the fourth *safīr*,"³⁵³ writing:

Al-Ṭūsī gives an example of how the agents refrained from collecting the *khums*: "Aḥmed b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥassan b. al-Walīd al-Qummī came to Baṣra as the representative of his father and the group (i.e. the agents in Qumm). The Imamites questioned him concerning rumours that he was the deputy of the Imam. But he denied them, saying: 'I have no right in this matter.' So they offered him money as a test, but he rejected it and said, 'It is forbidden for me to take it,

³⁵² Sachedina, "The Fifth in the Imāmī Shī'ī Legal System," 276.

³⁵³ Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, 139.

because I have no right in this matter (i.e. the deputyship of the Imam), and I have never made such a claim.”³⁵⁴

It is striking that al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī – along with the other Twelver exegetes discussed here – neglect the *ghayba* in their exegesis, just as they do in their commentaries on verse 59 of *Sūrat al-Nisa’*, in which they write uniformly that the phrase “those in authority” (*ūlī ’l-amr*) refers to the Imām, but do not acknowledge the Imām’s absence. This omission is not an accident, and it is no coincidence that it only occurs in the genre of *tafsīr*. A refusal to acknowledge the absence of the Imām would most likely have been considered politically subversive, because it implied that an absent leader was preferable to the actual, present rulers, and such a statement would have only been feasible to make within the more esoteric genre of *tafsīr*.

There are only minor differences between the commentaries of al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154) on the *khums* verse. They cite the same authorities (‘Aṭā ibn al-Sā’ib and Sufyān al-Thawrī), and al-Ṭūsī writes that “*fay’* is what is taken without fighting” and sources the view to “what is related in our³⁵⁵ *ḥadīth*”³⁵⁶ while al-Ṭabrisī cites “our Imāms” for the same opinion.³⁵⁷ The similarities in their views on the ways in which the

³⁵⁴ Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, 139-140. Hussain cites al-Ṭūsī’s *al-Ghayba*, 270.

³⁵⁵ “Our,” i.e., “Shī’a.”

³⁵⁶ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 5, 143.

khums should be divided and distributed reveal a discussion that seems set apart from any contemporary political context. Both say, as al-Ṭūsī wrote: “And as for the *khums* of the *ghanīma*, it is divided according to us into six portions: a portion for God, and a portion for His Messenger for the Prophet, and these two portions are with the portion of those related, for the *qā’im maqām* of the prophet [i.e., the imām in place of the Prophet] who spends it on himself and the members of his family from the Banū Hāshim. And a portion for the orphan, and a portion for the poor, and a portion for the wayfarer from the family of the Messenger.”³⁵⁸ Although the historical periods in which al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabrisī lived were vastly different, the extent to which al-Ṭabrisī’s exegesis echoes al-Ṭūsī’s is indicative of the unimportance – for Twelver Shī’ī thinkers – of the change from the Buyid to Seljuq regime, as both were seen as equally illegitimate.

Jassim M. Hussain notes that the Twelver intellectuals, beginning with al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, “refused to give themselves authority over the half of the *khums* which was set aside for the Imām,” but “by the beginning of the 7th AH/13th century the Imāmīte *Fuqahā’*, in particular, al-Muḥaqqiq al-Hillī wanted to solve this problem. He began receiving the Imām’s share in the *khums* and spent it on religious activities serving the

³⁵⁷ al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma’ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān / ta’līf Abī ‘Alī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī*, Vol. 2 (Qum, Irān: Maktabat Ayat Allāh al-‘Uẓma al-Mar’ashī al-Najafī, 1403 [1983]), 543.

³⁵⁸ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 5, 143-4.

Shī'ite cause.”³⁵⁹ The length of time between the Greater Occultation and the shift in authority towards the community of scholars indicates that the *tafsīr* that name the Imām as the rightful recipient of the *khums* tax reflect the scholars’ commitment to preserving the absent Imām’s role.

Tafsīr Outside of the Twelver Shī'a Tradition

The commentators recognize the impracticalities of giving a part of the tax to God, and they often interpret the portion for God as either designated for the Ka'ba, or as not being a significant part of the instruction. Roy Mottahedeh notes that, for Sunnī commentators, “the phrase ‘belongs to God’ is a prologue to the five categories of people mentioned subsequently,”³⁶⁰ and many commentators argue that giving a portion to God is futile because “to God is this world and the next” and so the injunction is merely rhetorical.³⁶¹ Tha'labī writes: “and some of them said: the meaning of His saying “and for God” is for the house of God there is a fifth...*ghanīma* was brought to the Prophet and he divided it into five parts and made four of them to be for whoever

³⁵⁹ Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam*, 149.

³⁶⁰ Mottahedeh, “Qur’ānic Commentary on the Verse of the Khums (al-Anfāl VIII: 41),” 94.

³⁶¹ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān al-ma'rūf bi-Tafsīr al-Tha'labī*, eds. Abū Muḥammad b. 'Ashūr and Naẓīr al-Sā'idī, Vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1423/2002), 357.

witnessed the fighting and he set aside portions [and he struck his hand] in it and whatever he took from it was for the Ka'ba and that is what is called for God.”³⁶²

Perhaps the most interesting take on what happens to Muḥammad's portion after his death is given by Abū Ḥanīfa, whom Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī quotes as saying, “As for after the death of the Messenger of God, peace and blessing upon him, his portion is stopped because of his death, and as such the portion of those related, and these are given to the poor among them, and they follow the pattern of what remains for the poor, and it is not given to the wealthy among them but apportioned to the orphan and the poor and the wayfarer.”³⁶³ Why do the Twelver exegetes not stop the Imām's portion in this manner after the Occultation? Again, the *tafsīr* reveals a glimpse into the Twelver view of the Occultation, in which the Imām – though hidden – is present in some fashion, and remains an authority. Although an assessment of whether ideas concerning Muḥammad's portion after his death coincided with the development of ideas about the Imām's portion following the Occultation is beyond the scope of this paper, it is certainly a topic worth interrogating in future work.

³⁶² al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, Vol. 4, 357. Roy Mottahedeh writes that Abū 'Aliya al-Riyāḥī, living in Basra at the “end of the first Islamic century,” also argued that God's portion should be given to the Ka'ba. Mottahedeh, “Qur'ānic Commentary on the Verse of the Khums (al-Anfāl VIII: 41),” 94.

³⁶³ Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr / lil-Imām al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*, Vol. 15 (Miṣr: al-Maṭba'ah al-Bahīyah al-Miṣrīyah, [1934-1962]), 165.

Most of the exegetes under examination in this chapter are of the opinion that “those related” is a reference to the Banū Hāshim, and even the exegetes who are argue that it indicates the Banū ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib are essentially making the same argument, as ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib was the son of Hāshim. For example, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī writes that “those who have a right to the *khums*, according to us, are from the descendents of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, since Hāshim had no descendents except: from the Ṭālibīyīn and the ‘Abbāsīyīn and the Ḥārithīyīn and the Lahabīyīn, and as for the descendents of ‘Abd Manāf from the Muṭṭalibīyīn, they have no share in it, and according to our companions, the *khums* is obligatory on every benefit that a person makes through income and profit of trade and treasure and mines and diving, and other than this we have mentioned in the books of *fiqh*.”³⁶⁴

However, this contrasts with al-Ṭabarī’s view that both the phrase “those related” indicates the Banū Hāshim and the Banū al-Muṭṭalib.³⁶⁵ Al-Ṭabarī takes great pains to stress the parity between the Banū Hāshim and the Banū al-Muṭṭalib – and the unequal status of the descendents of ‘Abd Shams and Nawfal – narrating a tradition from Jubayr ibn Muṭ‘im and ‘Uthmān ibn Affān, in which they say to Muḥammad ““these Banū Hāshim are your brothers, their distinction is not denied as a result of your relation to them, but what do you say in regard to our brothers, the Banū al-Muṭṭalib, giving to them and not to

³⁶⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 5, 144.

³⁶⁵ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān, ta’līf Abī Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 10 (Miṣr: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī [v.1, 1968] 1954-68), 6.

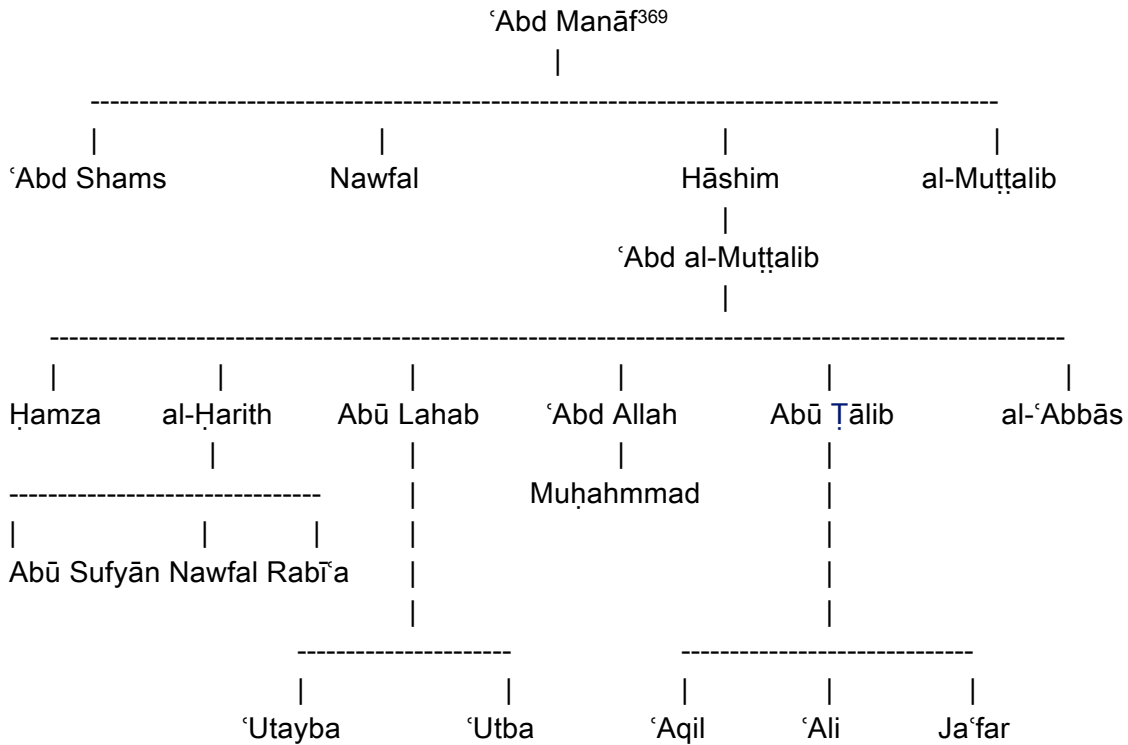
us, even though we and they are at the same status?’ And he said (peace be upon him), ‘They did not separate themselves from us during the Jāhiliya or in Islam, and truly the Banū Hāshim and the Banū al-Muṭṭalib are the same thing,’ and he linked his fingers.”³⁶⁶ The same tradition is also found elsewhere quite frequently; for example, in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s commentary,³⁶⁷ as well as in an account that Sachedina cites from Muṣ‘ab b. ‘Abd Allah al-Zubayrī’s *Kitāb nasab quraysh*.³⁶⁸ Stories such as these illustrate the tensions among the different branches of the descendants of ‘Abd Manāf – all of whom, in some fashion, constitute Muḥammad’s family.

³⁶⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 10 ([v.1, 1968] 1954-68), 6. This tradition is also cited in Mottahedeh, “Qur’ānic Commentary on the Verse of the Khums (al-Anfāl VIII: 41),” 97.

³⁶⁷ al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Vol. 15, 165.

³⁶⁸ Sachedina, “The Fifth in the Imāmī Shī‘ī Legal System,” 279-80.

Table II: Descendents of ‘Abd Manāf



Conclusions

As in the second chapter, what is perhaps most notable in this chapter is the mention of the Occultation in the non-exegetical works discussed here (and the very specific instructions concerning how the community of Twelver Shī'a must handle the absence of the Imām), while the Occultation goes unnoted in the *tafsīr*. However, perhaps because Qur'ān 8:41 deals with material goods – i.e., taxation – and Qur'ān 4:59 deals only with the abstract concept of obedience, the discussions here are tinged

³⁶⁹ This chart is redrawn from Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad*, xiii.

with that much more urgency. As seen in the *tafsīr*, the Twelvers write that, not only are “those related” limited to the descendants of the Bānū Hāshim, but also that even the orphan, the poor, and the wayfarer must be from among the family of the Prophet.

The question of the Prophet’s inheritance lies at the heart of the divide between the adherents of the first three caliphs and those who supported ‘Alid claims. Perhaps the best illustration of this conflict was the dispute over the Oasis of Fadak, which Muḥammad had granted to his daughter, Fāṭima. In response to Fāṭima’s claim, Abū Bakr was supposed to have said, “As for me, I have heard the Messenger of God say: ‘We [the prophets] do not have heirs (*lā nūriṭh*). Whatever we leave is alms (*ṣadaqa*). The family of Muḥammad (*āl Muḥammad*) can eat from that property.’” Wilferd Madelung argues that these words of Abū Bakr’s “solved the problem of the *ahl al-bayt* in one stroke without his losing face. Not only had Muḥammad disinherited his family, he had also specifically affirmed that after his death his family should, if in need, accept alms which he had strictly forbidden them during his life because of their status of purity.” This opinion of prophetic inheritance – or lack thereof – becomes the standard Sunnī view, which runs against the Twelver belief that Muḥammad’s descendants were the rightful inheritors of both his property and his political power.

However, the Twelver view is predicated on the inherited status of Muḥammad’s descendants, and – among other signifiers of that status – the idea that, in lieu of receipt of *ṣadaqa*, the Imāms’ right to the *khums* tax. However, there is more at stake here than

merely taxation or inherited property. As Madelung notes, bound up in the issue of material inheritance is also the question of whether the mantle of succession – the caliphate itself – was meant to be inherited by Muḥammad's direct descendants. The Twelver belief in the *khums* tax as a hereditary right implies that the authority of the Prophet was likewise meant to be inherited.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has examined the ways in which medieval Twelver Shī'a authors constructed the genre of exegesis and how they perceived its goals and limitations. An analysis of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's introduction to his *tafsīr*, as well as different commentaries on the Qur'ān's verses on authority and taxation, has revealed that exegesis is a genre of special status, meant to withstand the test of time and unmoored from ephemeral concerns such as the various dynasties who ruled in medieval Baghdad. In these works, the Occultation of the Twelfth Imām is also treated as a temporary development and therefore remains largely unmentioned; instead, all of the authors whose works are treated here exhort their followers to obey only a leader who is immune from sin (i.e., the Imām), in spite of the Imām's absence. In contrast to works outside of the genre of exegesis, the act of writing *tafsīr* appears as pietistic as the act of *ḥadīth* collection, whereas legal works and treatises seem more aimed at providing day-to-day instructions to the Shī'a community.

This dissertation has argued that the Twelver scholars under consideration here were aware of their different audiences for each genre in which they wrote, and they most likely expressed their true priorities in certain texts, while skirting them in others. Rather than having to resort to coding their language in popular texts, medieval Twelver exegetes differentiated between the messages they wrote to broad audiences outside of

exegesis, and the more esoteric *tafsīr* that was written for an audience of like-minded scholars, which was most likely never intended to be read by the masses.

In examining the differences between exegesis and non-exegesis written by the same authors, we may recollect Strauss' comment in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* that "contradictions or divergences within one book, or between two books by the same author, were supposed to prove that his thought had changed. If the contradictions exceeded a certain limit it was sometimes decided without any external evidence that one of the books must be spurious."³⁷⁰ Strauss argues that the authors in question changed their purported attitudes from one work to the next because they faced the pressures of censorship, and that the author's true and consistent meanings could be deciphered, but if the author wrote "in such a way that only a very careful reader can detect the meaning of his book,"³⁷¹ which Strauss calls "writing between the lines."³⁷²

In writing against the narrative that stated that the only explanation for an author's inconsistencies could be that the contradictory texts had to be forgeries, Strauss is perhaps not entirely fair to medieval authors. Just as modern authors revisit and revise their opinions, it is just as likely that this phenomenon accounts for inconsistencies in medieval writing. This dissertation has argued that the views expressed in a pietistic

³⁷⁰ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), 31.

³⁷¹ Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 25.

³⁷² Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 32.

work, such as exegesis, and intended to be read by a specialized audience, might also be quite different from the same author's writings across other genres.

In spite of the challenges of studying medieval Islamic history and its sources, we are fortunate to have the genre of exegesis, which we can compare to non-exegetical works. The differences that we have explored between these genres throughout this dissertation – most notably, omissions of the Occultation and the discussion of the Imām as a living presence in *tafsīr* – cast light on the (perhaps reluctant) pragmatism found outside of exegesis. It is highly likely that non-exegesis and *tafsīr* are both genuine, but that they are meant to serve vastly different purposes. Non-exegesis often serves as an instructional manual for the pious masses, and we have seen practical advice (e.g., what the Twelver community should do with its collection of the *khums* tax in the absence of the Imām) outside of *tafsīr*. In contrast, *tafsīr* is meant to have more staying power than other texts, which seem to belong more to their times and to retain a certain amount of elasticity. The *tafsīr* examined here appears to have been written with an aim of maintaining its relevance throughout time, including the time of the Twelfth Imām's return.

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³⁷³ "Ṭabrīsī" is the more common (and more correct) spelling, but this commentator is listed under the spelling "Ṭabarsī" in the Widener catalogue.

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