



'ALĪ AL-REŽĀ

'ALĪ AL-REŽĀ, ABU'L-ḤASAN B. MŪSĀ B. JA'FAR, the eighth Imam of the Emāmī Shi'ites. In Shi'ite sources he is commonly referred to as Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Tānī in order to distinguish him from his father, Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓem, who is known as Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Awwal. He was born and grew up in Medina. The year of his birth is variously given as 148/765, 151/768, and 153/770. The first date appears least reliable and may have been deduced from a prediction ascribed to his grandfather, who died in that year, that the successor to his son Mūsā would be born soon. There are indications that 'Alī may have been born as late as 159/775-76, since, according to Ya'qūbī, he died at the age of forty-four and, according to Wāqedī, he began rendering *fatwās* in his twenties. His mother was a slave (*omm walad*), probably of Nubian origin, whose name is variously given as Toktam, Naĵma, Šaqrā', Šahd, Omm-al-banīn, Kayzorān, Sakan, Arwā, or Sammān. His father, who died in prison in Baghdad in Rajab, 183/September, 799, made him his legatee, and 'Alī inherited his estate of Šorayyā' (?) near Medina to the exclusion of his many brothers. But the death of Imam Mūsā was denied by several of his *wakīls*; they withheld the money collected from the *koms* and vows of Imam Mūsā's followers and refused to recognize 'Alī as Imam, promising the return of his father as the Mahdī. This led to a large-scale defection from the ranks of his father's followers, especially in Kūfa and Baghdad; 'Alī was later accused by them of diverging from the teaching of his ancestors in some points. Of his brothers, none seems to have claimed the imamate for himself, though some apparently furthered the belief in the survival of their father. According to Wāqedī, he transmitted Hadith from his father and his uncles and gave *fatwās* in the mosque of Medina.



Though Wāqedī describes him as a reliable transmitter (*teqa*), he was evidently shunned by Sunni traditionists in Medina, and his transmitters were strictly Shi‘ite. There is no good evidence that he ever left Medina for an extended trip before his departure for Khorasan, though a Shi‘ite report describes a miraculous visit by him to the communities of his followers in Baṣra and Kūfa after the death of his father. Several of his brothers and his uncle Moḥammad b. Ja‘far participated in the ‘Alid revolts in Iraq and Arabia after the death of the caliph Amīn, but he refused any involvement. In 200/815-16, the caliph Ma‘mūn wrote inviting him to come to Marv and sent Raǰā’ b. Abi’l-Žaḥḥāk, cousin of the vizier Faḏl b. Sahl, and the eunuch Fernās to accompany him on his trip. Shi‘ite sources name in place of Fernās the eunuch Yāser, who later appears in the personal service of the Imam and, after the latter’s death, reported about him in Qom. The assertion by Abu’l-Faraǰ Eṣfahānī and Mofīd that the Imam was accompanied to Marv by the general ‘Īsā Jolūdī is definitely mistaken. The latter in this year suppressed the rebellion of Moḥammad b. Ja‘far in Mecca and took him along to Iraq, where he was surrendered to Raǰā’ b. Abi’l-Žaḥḥāk (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 993-95). Raǰā’ thus conveyed both ‘Alids to Khorasan. The Imam seems to have made the pilgrimage to Mecca in this year accompanied by his five-year-old son Moḥammad. He set out for Marv early in 201/late summer, 816. His travel route was, according to most sources, via Baṣra, Ahvāz, and Fārs; this was natural since Baghdad and Kūfa at this time were in the hands of rebels. Ya‘qūbī’s statement that Raǰā’ traveled via Baghdad and Nehāvand (Māh al-Baṣra) is thus erroneous. It is certain that the Imam did not pass through Qom. He visited Nīšāpūr, where the prominent Sunni traditionists like Ebn Rāhūya, Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā, Moḥammad b. Rāfe‘, and Aḥmad b. Ḥarb came out to meet him, and he stayed for some time in the town. Shi‘ite sources report that next to the house where he stayed he planted an almond tree whose fruit had miraculous healing power. A bath in the quarter of his residence was known in the time of Ebn Bābūya as Ḥammām al-Rezā and people used to come to wash in and drink from a spring there where he had washed himself and prayed. On a new summons of Ma‘mūn, the Imam continued on to Marv. According to some Shi‘ite accounts, Ma‘mūn at first proposed to resign from the caliphate in favor of him. The Imam resisted his proposals for about two months but finally consented reluctantly to an appointment as heir to the caliphate. Ma‘mūn gave him the title Rezā, which had previously been used in Shi‘ite rebellions to refer to the descendant of the Prophet upon whose choice as caliph the Muslim community would agree. Shi‘ite claims that the name had been given to him by his father appear to be without foundation. The *bay‘a* of



the dignitaries and army leaders in Marv to the heir-apparent took place according to Ṭabarī on 2 Ramaẓān 201/23 March 817, according to Şūlī on 5 Ramaẓān/27 March. The first to pledge allegiance to Reẓā, who was dressed in green, was Ma'mūn's still minor son 'Abbās. Among the poets who offered their eulogies to him on this occasion were Ebrāhīm b. 'Abbās Şūlī and De'bel Kozā'ī. Both were given 10,000 of the newly minted dirhams bearing the name of the 'Alid. 'Abbasids and 'Alids then took turns in receiving gifts, the former led by 'Abbās b. Ma'mūn, the latter by Moḥammad b. Ja'far. After the ceremony, on 7 Ramaẓān/30 March, an official letter of the caliph announcing the appointment was drawn up to be read in the mosques throughout the empire. Ma'mūn gave orders that the name of the crown prince be included in the *koṭba* everywhere and that the color of the uniforms, official dress, and flags be changed from black, the official 'Abbasid color, to green. The color green had not previously been associated with the 'Alids and was probably intended to signify a reconciliation between 'Abbasids and 'Alids rather than a surrender to the claims of the latter.

The extraordinary decision of the caliph, which immediately aroused strong opposition, especial among the 'Abbasids, was widely attributed, even in Khorasan, to the influence of the Persian vizier Faẓl b. Sahl. Among the later historians, this view was supported by Sallāmī in his *Akbār Korāsān* and by Şūlī, who quoted the Tahirid 'Obaydallāh b. 'Abdallāh b. Ṭāher as affirming that Faẓl proposed the appointment to Ma'mūn. In other accounts, however, the initiative is ascribed to the caliph himself and Faẓl is reported to have at first resisted the appointment pointing out the grave danger of such a move. This version is clearly more in consonance with the known political views of the caliph and the vizier. According to some reports, the caliph made his decision in fulfillment of an earlier vow that he would turn over the caliphate to a descendant of 'Alī if he were granted victory over his brother Amīn. In his official letter, he explained that he had found 'Alī al-Reẓā to be the most excellent and suitable candidate among the descendants of 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb and expressed his hope that his choice would help to restore concord in the Muslim community. In his note of acceptance added to the document, Reẓā expressed similar sentiments, commending Ma'mūn for his efforts to remedy the wrongs previously done to the 'Alids and promising to treat the 'Abbasids justly if he should succeed to the caliphate. That Faẓl b. Sahl had to be reassured with respect to the caliph's decision is indicated by the fact that Ma'mūn on the same day wrote another letter lauding the vizier's past services and granting him and his brother Ḥasan unrestricted powers as



well as additional compensation in money, jewels, and land and the right to retire with full honors at any time he might desire.

The relations between Ma'mūn and Režā in Marv were close; Režā is reported to have stayed in a house adjoining the caliph's residence, and they appear to have visited each other daily. Ma'mūn evidently desired that Režā should immediately share in the rule and in all official ceremonial. Režā, however, is reported to have stipulated that he would not participate in the business of state. He was given his own police force (*šoraṭ*) and guard (*ḥaras*) under commanders belonging to the Khorasanian loyalists of Ma'mūn as well as a chamberlain (*ḥājeb*) and a secretary (*kāteb*). The caliph relied on his judgment in religious questions and arranged for debates between him and Muslim scholars as well as the leaders of other religious communities. At the beginning of the year 202/late summer, 817, the ties between the caliph and Režā were further strengthened as marriages were contracted between Režā and Ma'mūn's daughter Omm Ḥabīb, between Režā's son Moḥammad (who was only six years old and remained in Medina) and Ma'mūn's daughter Omm al-Faḏl, and between Ma'mūn and Būrān, daughter of Ḥasan b. Sahl. Only the union between Režā and Omm Ḥabīb took place immediately. Režā's relations with Faḏl b. Sahl apparently were never good. According to several accounts, the vizier had been hiding from Ma'mūn the seriousness of the opposition in Iraq and it was Režā who opened his eyes to it and urged him to return to Baghdad in order to restore peace by his presence. Režā's assessment of the situation being supported by several army chiefs, Ma'mūn decided to leave for Iraq. Faḏl b. Sahl whose aim it had been to keep the capital in the east, offered his resignation, pointing out the extreme hatred of the 'Abbasids in Baghdad for him personally and requested the caliph to leave him as governor in Khorasan. Ma'mūn again assured him of his complete trust and asked him to compose another letter in the caliph's name confirming his exceptional privileges. The letter which affirmed the caliph's unrestricted support of the vizier and his policy and contained the full text of the previous letter, was signed by Ma'mūn in Ṣafar, 202/August-September, 817 and, at the request of Faḏl, formally confirmed by Režā. It was then sent to be published throughout the empire. Six months later, as Ma'mūn slowly moved west with his court, the vizier was murdered in Saraḵs by several army officers, on 2 Ša'bān 202/12 February 818. The caliph ordered their execution, while they claimed to have acted under his order. When he reached Ṭūs, Režā fell ill and died after a few days, according to the most reliable accounts on the last day of Ṣafar, 203/September 818. Other dates mentioned range from Ṣafar, 202/September,



817 to Du'l-qa'da, 203/May, 819. The caliph asked a group of 'Alid relatives of Rezā, including his uncle Moḥammad b. Ja'far, to examine his body in order to have their testimony that he had died a natural death and ordered that he be buried next to the tomb of his own father, Hārūn al-Rašīd, in the house of Ḥomayd b. Qaḥṭaba in Sanābād near Nawqān. He displayed extreme grief and is reported to have walked bareheaded in the funeral procession and to have stayed on the grave for three days. Nevertheless, most of the sources charge him with having poisoned Rezā. The sudden demise of both the vizier and the heir-apparent, whose presence would have made any reconciliation with the powerful 'Abbasid opposition in Baghdad virtually impossible, must indeed arouse strong suspicion that Ma'mūn had had a hand in the deaths. This does not mean that his grief for the 'Alid, towards whom he seems to have a deep sense of veneration and attachment, was insincere. But as on other occasions in his reign, cold political calculation appears to have outweighed his personal sentiments and ideal.

Emāmī tradition ascribes to Imam 'Alī al-Rezā numerous miracles demonstrating his foreknowledge of deaths and other events, his ability to read the minds of his visitors, to interpret dreams, and to strike bars of gold out of the earth, his healing power, his knowledge of all human and animal languages, and the fulfillment of his prayers. Several short works are attributed to him:

1. *Al-Resālat al-ḍahabīya* (or *al-moḍahhaba*) *fī'l-ṭebb*, a treatise on medical cures and the maintenance of good health which is said to have been written for the caliph Maṣṣūr at his request (text edited in Bombay and fully quoted in Maḡlesī, *Beḡār al-anwār* LXII, pp. 308-28). It was named "the golden treatise" because Ma'mūn ordered it to be written with gold ink. Among the Emāmī bibliographers of the 5th/11th century it was known through the initial transmission of Moḥammad b. Ḥasan b. Jomhūr 'Ammī, a Basran Emāmī transmitter considered unreliable and extremist. A number of commentaries have been written to it and it has been translated into Persian and Urdu.
2. *Ṣaḡīfat al-Rezā*, a collection of 240 Hadīths initially transmitted by 'Abdallāh b. Aḡmad b. 'Āmer from his father Aḡmad, who stated to have heard it from Rezā in 194/809-10. 'Abdallāh b. Aḡmad b. 'Āmer is mentioned by Najāšī as the transmitter of a *nosḡa* from Rezā.
3. *Feqh al-Rezā*. This book was unknown among Emāmī scholars until the 10th/16th century, when a group of scholars from Qom brought a copy of it containing numerous *eḡāzas* to Mecca. It was judged to be authentic by the two Maḡlesīs but later Emāmī scholars were



divided about it, the majority considering its authenticity as doubtful. It has been convincingly argued by S. H. Şadr that the greater part of the book is taken from the otherwise lost *Ketāb al-taklīf* of the Emāmī heretic Moḥammad b. 'Alī Şalmaġānī (d. 322/934; see his "Faşl al-qazā' fi'l-ketāb al-moştahar be *Feqh al-Rezā*," in *Āšnāyī bā čand noska-ye kaṭṭī* I, Qom, 1396/1976, pp. 389-442). Other works attributed to Rezā are listed in *A'yān al-şī'a* IV/2, pp. 180ff., and Sezgin, *GAS* I, p. 536. Shi'ite sources also contain detailed description of his debates on religious questions and quotations of his sayings and his poetry.

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