



## BĀQER, ABŪ JA'FAR MOḤAMMAD

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AL-BĀQER, ABŪ JA'FAR MOḤAMMAD B. 'ALĪ B. ḤOSAYN B. 'ALĪ B. ABĪ ṬĀLEB, the fifth imam of the Twelver Shi'ites. His mother was Omm 'Abd-Allāh Fāṭema, Ḥasan b. 'Alī's daughter, who is described as a saintly woman. His honorary name al-Bāqer is commonly held to refer to his "splitting open knowledge (*bāqer al-'elm*)," signifying his erudition in the religious sciences. It was said that the Prophet Moḥammad named him so when he predicted the birth of his great-great-grandson and charged the long-lived companion Jāber Anṣārī (d. 73/692) with conveying his salutations to him. According to most Shi'ite sources, he was born in Medina in 57/677 and died there in 114/732 at the age of 57. The preference for these dates seems to rest partly on the parallelism of 57. According to another Shi'ite report, he predicted correctly his death at 58 years, just as his ancestors 'Alī, Ḥosayn, and 'Alī b. Ḥosayn had all been killed, or died, at 58. According to Wāqedī, he died in 117/735 and, according to Kalīfa b. Kayyāt, in 118/736 (*Ta'rik Kalīfa b. al-Kayyāt*, ed. A. D. 'Omarī, Beirut, 1397/1977, p. 349). These dates seem more likely since the reports about the rising of his brother Zayd in 120-22/738-40 suggest that he had died only recently so that the question of the succession was still open among his Kufan followers. The death date mentioned by Mas'ūdī (*Morūj* VI, p. 17), 125-26/743-44, is definitely too late. Equally unacceptable is the birth date 44/664 implied by Wāqedī, since his father is known to have been 23 years old at the battle of Karbalā' in 61/680. Other dates given for al-Bāqer's birth are 54/676 and 59/678-79. Most of his life he stayed in Medina. As an infant he was



present at the battle of Karbalā'. According to Madā'enī (*Aḡānī*, p. 13), his father sent him and his brother 'Abd-Allāh together with the wife and family of Marwān b. Ḥakam to Ṭā'ef just before the siege of Medina under Yazīd in 63/683. This was done for the safety of his sons, who were still minor children, and of Marwān's wife as is evident from the parallel report of Abū Meḵnaf (Ṭabarī, II, pp. 410, 420) where, however, only 'Abd-Allāh, without al-Bāqer, is mentioned. According to Shi'ite reports, al-Bāqer was briefly summoned by the caliph Hešām (105-25/724-43) to Damascus where he confounded Christians in debate. He attended the funeral of the Shi'ite poet Koṭayyer 'Azza in Medina in 105/723 and rewarded Komayt, another Shi'ite poet, when the latter recited a poem before him, and he gave him permission to eulogize the Omayyads. The reports in some late Sunni sources that he died at Ḥomayma, the seat of the 'Abbasids in Palestine, probably rest on a confusion with the 'Abbasid Moḥammad b. 'Alī and are unreliable. He was buried in Medina in the cemetery of Baqī' al-Ġarqad.

Sunni and Shi'ite sources agree in describing him as an eminent religious scholar. They sharply contrast, however, in their reports about his scholarly activity and views. In the Sunni sources he appears as a member of the conservative orthodox aristocracy of Medina transmitting mostly from, and to, well-known Sunni authorities. He is quoted as declaring his loyalty to Abū Bakr and 'Omar, calling them imams of right guidance and dissociating himself from their enemies. He called Abū Bakr the Truthful (*ṣeddīq*) and, when questioned about it, jumped up to repeat it three times adding that whoever did not call him so, his word would not be accepted by God on earth and in the hereafter. He reported that 'Alī had followed the practice of Abū Bakr and 'Omar with regard to the share of the Prophet and his relatives in the booty explaining that 'Alī did not wish to be charged with contravening their practice. He cursed Moḵtār, the avenger of Ḥosayn, as a liar and declared his dissociation from the extremist Shi'ites Moḡīra b. Sa'd and Bayān. He denied that he or anyone of the family of the Prophet had ever upheld the doctrine of *raj'a* or considered any offense as equivalent to polytheism. He affirmed that his father and he prayed behind "them" (the representatives of the Omayyad caliphate) "without practicing religious dissimulation (*fī ḡayr taqīya*)" (Ebn Sa'd, V, p. 158). He denied being the Mahdi and affirmed that the Mahdi would be of 'Abd Šams adding that in his view he was none other than the later caliph 'Omar II (Ebn Sa'd, V, p. 245). When later the Khorasanian leaders Qaḥtaba and Solaymān b. Kaṭīr asked him about the identity of the rightful imam, he referred them to the 'Abbasid Moḥammad b. 'Alī in Syria.



Ṭabarī quotes Bāqer in his history frequently about details of the life of Moḥammad and ‘Alī and cites a lengthy report of his about the events leading up to the death of Ḥosayn at Karbalā’. He is invariably considered a trustworthy transmitter by the Sunni *ḥadīṭ* experts. Nasā’ī mentions him as one of the early legal scholars (*foqahā’*) of Medina. Abū Dāwūd included a *ḥadīṭ* transmitted by him in his *Sunan*. Numerous edifying sayings of his were narrated in Sufi circles.

In Shi’ite tradition al-Bāqer appears as the inaugurator of the religious and legal teaching that was further elaborated by his son Ja’far al-Ṣādeq and formed the basis of Imami Shi’ism. Here he stood within the tradition of the radical wing of the Shi’ites, repudiating the caliphate of Abū Bakr, ‘Omar, and ‘Oṭmān and endowing the ‘Alid imams with supernatural qualities and knowledge. From the Kaysāniya, the main representatives of radical Shi’ism in his time, he seems to have adopted doctrines like *badā’* and *raj’a*, the return of some of the dead before the resurrection for retaliation. He shunned, however, revolutionary activity and espoused the principle of *taqīya*, precautionary dissimulation. He is quoted as stating: “*Taqīya* is part of my religion and the religion of my fathers. Whoever has no *taqīya* has no faith.” The systematic practice of *taqīya* no doubt explains the contrast between the Sunni and Shi’ite reports about his teaching. Neither of the two aspects presented by them should be considered as basically fictitious.

Al-Bāqer’s views on legal and ritual questions are frequently quoted in Imami and Zaydī works. It is clear that some of the basic characteristics and specific rules of Twelver Shi’ite law, like the permission for the temporary marriage (*moṭ’a*) and the prohibition of the ritual wiping of the shoes (*mash’ala’l-koffayn*), go back to him. A commentary on the Qur’ān attributed to al-Bāqer was transmitted by his disciple Abu’l-Jārūd Zīād b. Monḍer and is quoted frequently in the *Tafsīr* of ‘Alī b. Ebrāhīm Qomī. It reflects a strictly predestinarian theology (see W. Madelung, “The Shiite and Khārijite Contribution to pre-Ash’arite *Kalām*,” in P. Morewedge, ed., *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, Albany, 1979, pp. 136-37 n. 51). Al-Bāqer appears often as the author of apocalyptic prophecies, transmitted from him mostly by the Shi’ite traditionist Jāber Jo’fi. In spite of their Shi’ite character, such prophecies were taken over and transmitted by Sunni traditionists. Although some elements of this material may go back to al-Bāqer, most of it consists of later elaborations posterior even to Jāber (see Madelung, “The Sufyānī between Tradition and History,” *Stud. Isl.* 63, 1986, esp. pp. 10-11, 34-35).



The Shi'ite biographical sources narrate numerous stories of a legendary character about al-Bāqer's debates with religious leaders and scholars like Ṭāwūs, Qatāda b. De'āma, Moḥammad b. Monkader, Abū Ḥanīfa, 'Amr b. 'Obayd, Nāfe' b. Azraq and his son 'Abd-Allāh b. Nāfe', whom he stunned by his religious learning. They ascribe many miracles to him, like his conversing with ring-turtledoves and a wolf, his answering questions of jinnis on religious law and his being served by a jinni, his being visited by Keẓr and the prophet Elias, his restoring youth to the aged Ḥabbāba Wālebīya and giving temporary eyesight to the blind Abu'l-Baṣīr, and his causing an earthquake by lightly moving a thread brought by the angel Gabriel from heaven. According to some anachronistic stories he died poisoned, either involuntarily by the caliph 'Abd-al-Malek (d. 86/705) with a poisoned saddle during a quarrel between al-Bāqer and Zayd b. Ḥasan about the inheritance of the Prophet or by the caliph Ebrāhīm b. Walīd (ruling in 127/745).

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