



ČAHĀRDAH MA'ŠŪM

ČAHĀRDAH MA'ŠŪM, the fourteen inerrant or immaculate personages venerated by Twelver Shi'ites, i.e., the Prophet Moḥammad, his daughter Fāṭema, and the twelve imams. The ascription of inerrancy (*ešma*) to the imams is encountered as early as the first half of the 2nd/18th century, and it was soon extended to the prophets. Ebn Bābūya (d. 381/992), Šayḵ Mofīd (d. 413/1022), and Šarīf Mortazā (d. 436/1049) successively defined the inerrancy of the Prophet Moḥammad and the imams in increasingly stringent form, until the doctrine came to exclude the commission on their part of any sin or inadvertence, either before or after their assumption of office. As for Fāṭema, her inerrancy derives from her being a link between prophethood and imamate, the two institutions characterized by inerrancy (she is sometimes termed the confluence of two lights [*majma' al-nūrayn*]), as well as by her association with the imams and their attributes in numerous traditions. The chief Koranic proofs of the inerrancy of the Čahārdah Ma'šūm are taken to be 33:33 (the verse of purification—*āyat al-taḥīr* and 2:124 (“My covenant does not embrace the wrongdoers”).

It might be thought that the numbering of the inerrant ones as fourteen was retrospective and subsequent to the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, and it is certainly true that some time elapsed between the death of the eleventh Imam, Ḥasan al-'Askarī, in 260/873 and the emergence of a consensus that the Imamite line had been completed with the occultation of his infant son, the Twelfth Imam (Sachedina, pp. 42ff.) However, materials already existed in Shi'ite tradition that spoke of Twelve Imam only, so that the crystallization of



belief in a line of twelve was not excessively problematic (Kohlberg, pp. 529-33).

The inerrancy of the Prophet, 'Alī, Ḥasan, and Ḥosayn, together with nine unnamed descendants of Ḥosayn, is attested in a tradition attributed to the Prophet (Majlesī, 1384, XXV, p. 201). In another tradition, which has the Prophet addressing Salmān, the nine are named explicitly, and mention of Fāṭema is, also included. (ibid., pp. 6-7). The same tradition states that the Prophet, Fāṭema, and the Twelve Imams were created out of light, “before the creation of creation.” Related to this luminous origin of the Čahārdah Ma'šūm is the interpretation of the Light Verse (24:35) and, indeed, of almost every Koranic reference to light, as alluding to them (ibid., XXIII, pp. 304-48, XXVI, pp. 242-43; Šīrāzī, pp. 209-11). According to Ja'far al-Šādeq, the creation of the Čahārdah Ma'šūm from light preceded that of all other beings by fourteen thousand years (Majlesī, 1384, XX, pp. 15-16). Other traditions speak of the Čahārdah Ma'šūm being fashioned from “celestial clay,” “white clay,” “clay beneath the Throne,” and “the clay of the Throne” (ibid., XX, pp. 15-16, XXV, pp. 8-12).

The succession of the Čahārdah Ma'šūm on earth is held to mirror the order in which they responded, in pre-eternity, to the divine question, “Am I not your Lord?” (Qur'ān 7:172), and the line of descent connecting them is taken to be a visible sign of their joint origin as a single luminous substance (Corbin, 1971-72, I, p. 68). Even the sperm from which they grew was of ultimately heavenly origin (Majlesī, 1384, XX, p. 38).

There was evidently a tendency to believe in God's delegation (*tafwīz*) of the task of creation to the Čahārdah Ma'šūm, since Majlesī finds it necessary to denounce this belief (ibid., XXV, pp. 328ff.). However, the Fourteen Inerrant Ones are said to have witnessed creation (ibid., XXV, pp. 339-41), and a tradition attributed to Moḥammad al-Bāqer, the Fifth Imam, proclaims, “We [the Imams or the Čahārdah Ma'šūm] are the means (*sabab*) for the creation of creation” (ibid., XX, p. 20). There is general agreement among Shi'ite authorities that all fourteen are superior to the rest of creation, including even the major prophets (ibid., XXVI, pp. 267-319).

The cosmic functions of the Čahārdah Ma'šūm were much elaborated by the theosophers of the Safavid period. Mollā Šadrā (d. 1050the 1640) integrated the Čahārdah Ma'šūm into Avicennan cosmology, enabling them to replace the Active Intelligences (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*) as the ontological causes of existence



(Nasr, p. 58). Qāzī Saʿīd Qomī (d. 1103/1691) designated them as a “supernal humanity” (*bašar al-ʿawālī*), eternally gathered around the Throne in their essential beings (Corbin, I, p. 98). It can be said that the French scholar Henry Corbin has both reflected and continued this Safavid tradition, with his frequent evocation of “the pleroma of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones” as divine epiphanies manifest at every level of being (numerous references in *En Islam iranien* and other works).

The Čahārdah Maʿšūm are collectively present at the level of popular piety in the formula that invoke divine blessings on all of them by name and that are known generically as *zīārāt-e jāmeʿa* (for examples, see Qomī, 1340, and Corbin, I, pp. 71-73). Dreams and visions of the Čahārdah Maʿšūm are sometimes encountered in Shiʿite biographies; particularly remarkable, perhaps, was the vision seen by Ḥaydar Āmolī in the sky over Baghdad, with the fourteen figures arranged diagrammatically around a square (Corbin, III, pp. 200-08).

It remains to add that the Čahārdah Maʿšūm are venerated by the nominally Shiʿite Bektāšī order of dervishes (q.v.), who add a second series of fourteen, consisting of various offspring of the Imams, to yield the numerologically significant total of twenty-eight (Birge, pp. 147-48).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

J. K. Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, London, 1937.

H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, 4 vols., Paris, 1971-72.

Idem, *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste*, new ed., Paris, 1979 (s.v. index “Quatorze Immaculés”).

E. Kohlberg, “From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ʿAshariyya,” *BSOAS* 39, 1976, pp. 521-34.

W. Madelung and E. Tyan, “Išma,” in *EI*². Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesī, *ʿAyn al-ḥayāt*, Tehran, 1347 Š./1968, pp. 101-02.



Idem, *Jalā' al-'oyūn dar zendagī wa mašā'eb-e Čahārdah Ma'šūm*, Tehran, n.d.

Idem, *Beḥār al-anwār*, 102 vols., Tehran, 1384/1964.

M. Mossa, *Extremist Shi'ites. The Ghulat Sects*, Syracuse, N.Y., 1988, p. 108.

Shaikh 'Abbās Qomī, *Mafātīḥ al-jenān*, Tehran, 1340 Š./1961.

Idem, *Safīnāt al-beḥār*, Tehran, 1355 Š./1963; II, pp. 201-02.

S. H. Nasr, *Sadr al-Din Shirazi and His Transcendent Theosophy*, Tehran, 1978.

A. A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism. The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism*, Albany, N.Y., 1981.

Ş. Şirāzī, *Ahl al-Bayt fi'l-Qor'an*, Beirut, 1400/1979.