



JAFAR AL-ŞĀDEQ I. LIFE

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i. Life

The most extensive biographical sources for Ja'far al-Şādeq are to be found amongst the various Shi'ite branches, though the exact date of his birth, or his accession to the imamate are uncertain. Most sources mention 83/702 for his birth (though 80/699 and 86/705 are also recorded; e.g., Ya'qubi, II, p. 458; Mas'udi, IV, p. 132; 'Āmeli, IV/2, p. 29). Similarly, the date when he became imam (that is, the death of his father, the fifth imam, Moḥammad al-Bāqer) is recorded as 117/735 in most sources (though 114/732 and 126/743 are also found in some sources; e.g., Ebn Qotayba, p., 215; 'Āmeli, IV/2, p. 3). His death date is almost universally agreed to have been 148/765.

Imam Ja'far al-Şādeq's life spanned the latter half of the Umayyad dynasty ruling from Damascus, which was marked by various rebellions (mainly by Shi'ite movements), the rise of the 'Abbasids (a movement that drew on Shi'ite themes), and the establishment of the 'Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. Throughout this period, he appears to have maintained the politically quietist stance of his father, Imam Moḥammad al-Bāqer. Whether the revolt of Imam al-Bāqer's half-brother Zayd b. 'Ali in 122/740 was during Ja'far al-Şādeq's imamate or that of his father depends on which of the various dates for the latter's death is taken. It is clear, however, that Ja'far al-Şādeq did not wish to be associated with the revolt and, according to a number of reports Shaikh Mofid (*Eršād* II, pp. 174-75) condemned the uprising, since he believed that the



rebellion would be counter-productive and ultimately harmful to the true community of believers (i.e., the Shi'ites). Similarly, he refused to be involved in the 'Abbasid uprising and offered no support even after the 'Abbasids gained power in 132/750. His motives for this refusal were grounded in his belief that he alone was the imam, having been designated as such by the preceding imam, his father. This belief was founded on the doctrine of *nasÂsÂ* (clear designation) of the incumbent imam of his successor. *NasÂsÂ* was in turn based on the notion that the incumbent imam was protected from error by God (*'esÂma* "inerrancy"; see [ĀHÂRDÂH MA'ŞUM](#)). Therefore, the incumbent imam's designation was, in effect, a revealing of God's will for the future leadership of the Shi'ites. Some, particularly the followers of Zayd (the Zaydiyya), did not recognize this doctrine and branched off to form their own distinct Shi'ite tradition, with quite different notions of the functions of an imam.

Apart from those traditions that record the explicit designation of Ja'far al-Şadeq as imam by his father, there is also a bundle of historical accounts of Ja'far al-Şadeq acting as Moḥammad al-Bāqer's traveling companion. Such stories reinforce the closeness of the father-son relationship and further secure Ja'far al-Şadeq's imamate in the face of Zaydi attack. In particular, there is the story of Imam al-Bāqer being summoned to Damascus by Hešām b. 'Abd-al-Malek (r. 724-43) after besting Nāfe' in debate over the powers of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Tāleb (q.v.). Ja'far al-Şadeq accompanied his father on this journey (for an account of the debate and its aftermath, see Qomi, II, pp. 246-86). Such explicit confrontations with the ruling power were, however, rare for both of them. Just as he had refused to be involved in the uprisings of Zayd or the 'Abbasids against Umayyad rule, Ja'far al-Şadeq offered no support to the uprising of his own cousin Moḥammad b. 'Abd-Allāh b. Ḥasan, called al-Nafs al-Zakiya (the Pure Soul) and referred to as al-Mahdi (Ebn al-Teqtaqā, pp. 132-33), in 145/762 against the 'Abbasids after they had gained power in Baghdad.

Ja'far al-Şadeq was, it seems, happy to pursue a scholarly imamate, studying and teaching in Medina. He acquired a number of followers and supporters, most (though not all) of Shi'ite persuasion. He is respected by the Sunnis as a transmitter of Hadith and a jurist (*faqih*), while the Shi'ites, who consider him an imam and as such infallible (see [ĀHÂRDÂH MA'ŞUM](#)), record his sayings and actions in works of Hadith and jurisprudence (*feqh*, q.v.). The Isma'ili jurist Qāzi Abu Ḥanifa No'mān b. Moḥammad Qayrawāni (d. 363/974), has



preserved a number of Ja‘far al-Şādeq’s legal opinions, presenting them as authoritative expositions of the Islamic religious law (*şari‘a*; see, e.g., *Da‘ā‘em* I, p. 4). In imami Shi‘ite writings, his legal dicta constitute the most important source of imami law. Indeed, imami legal doctrine is called *al-Madhab al-Ja‘fari* by both Imamis and Sunnis in recognition of his legal authority. A number of works are attributed to him, though none of these can be securely described as authored by Ja‘far al-Şādeq. Included in this list is a Qur‘ān commentary (*tafsir*), a work on divination (*Ketāb al-jaf̄r*), various versions of his will, and a number of collections of legal dicta (Sezgin, I, pp. 528-32, IV, pp. 128-31, VII, pp. 323-24; ‘Āmeli, IV/2, pp. 52 ff.; Āgā Bozorg Ṭehrāni, III, p. 121, XXI, pp. 110-11). In addition to these, there are many reports attributed to him in the early Shi‘ite Hadith collections; he features as a central source of imami doctrine, for example, in Moḥammad b. Ya‘qub Kolayni’s *al-Kāfi*.

Ja‘far al-Şādeq’s circle of followers included two of the most important imami theologians, namely, Abu Mo-ḥammad Heşām b. Ḥakam (d. 179/796) and Abu Ja‘far Moḥammad b. No‘mān (d. after 183/799). Heşām proposed a number of doctrines that later became orthodox imami theology, including the rational necessity of the divinely guided imam in every age to teach and lead God’s community. Moḥammad b. No‘mān (nicknamed Şayṭān al-Ṭāq) held anthropomorphist doctrines, which on occasions clashed with later imami theology (influenced as it was by Mo‘tazelite thought; for their works see Ebn al-Nadim, pp. 223-24, tr. pp. 437-38). The “extremist” (*ġāli*; see GÖLĀT) Abu’l-Ḳaṭṭāb Moḥammad Asadi (executed ca. 138/755) is also said to have been associated with Ja‘far al-Şādeq. According to the heresiographers, Abu’l-Ḳaṭṭāb claimed to have been appointed as the representative of Ja‘far al-Şādeq, receiving secret doctrines from him. His extreme views on the divinity of Ja‘far al-Şādeq and his own status as the prophetic emissary of God (i.e., Ja‘far al-Şādeq) seem to have led Ja‘far al-Şādeq to repudiate him, though Abu’l-Ḳaṭṭāb supposedly maintained that the repudiation was part of Ja‘far al-Şādeq’s technique at preserving his true nature. The followers of his doctrine were called Ḳaṭṭābiya (Aş‘ari, pp. 10-13; Şahrastāni, pp. 136-38, tr. Afzal-al-Din Torka, pp. 140-41, tr. Haarbrücker, I, pp. 206-8; Naw-baḳti, pp. 68 ff.). In any case, imami tradition rejects any association between Ja‘far al-Şādeq and Abu’l-Ḳaṭṭāb’s eccentric views.

Ja‘far al-Şādeq is also recorded as having taught with, or studied under Abu Ḥanifa and Mālek b. Anas, two of the eponyms of the Sunni legal schools (the Ḥanafiya and the Mālekiya respectively). More is recorded concerning the



relationship between Abu Ḥanifa and Ja'far al-Şādeq. Shi'ite sources portray Ja'far al-Şādeq as consistently humbling Abu Ḥanifa, pointing out defects in his reasoning and his incompetence in legal argument (see, e.g., Ebn Bābawayh, *Elal al-Şari'a* I, p. 86). They clearly arose out of a Shi'i-Sunni (and more specifically Shi'i-Ḥanafī) polemic, though they may reflect the character of the relationship between the two jurists.

According to most sources, Ja'far al-Şādeq died in 148/765 (e.g., Mas'udi, IV, pp. 132-33), supposedly poisoned by the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mans'ur, though to what political end is unclear. He left behind him uncertainty about the future of the imamate. He had designated Abu Moḥammad Esmā'il (q.v.), his eldest son by his first wife, Fāṭema, as the next imam, but Esmā'il had predeceased him. Some claimed that Esmā'il had not died, but was in hiding; others claimed that Esmā'il's son, Moḥammad, should be the next imam. Both of these groups went on to form the Isma'iliya (q.v.) Shi'ite (Daftary, pp. 93-99). Others claimed that after Esmā'il, Ja'far al-Şādeq had designated his second eldest son 'Abd-Allāh al-Afṭaḥ as the next imam. The majority, though, supported the imamate of Musā al-Kāzem, son of Ḥamida (or Ḥomayda, a Berber slave) and Ja'far al-Şādeq, as the imam. It was this line which went to form the Twelver (imami) Shi'ite, which has predominated in Persia since the 16th century (Daftary, pp. 93-99; 'Āmeli, IV/2, p. 80).

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