



MOḤAMMAD AL-JAWĀD, ABU JA'FAR

MOḤAMMAD AL-JAWĀD b. 'Ali b. Musā, **ABU JA'FAR**, ninth imam of the Twelver Shi'ites (b. Medina, Ramaẓān 195/June 811; d. Baghdad, Du'l-qa'da 220/November 835). In common usage he is called by the epithet al-Jawād (occasionally al-Taqi), while in the Shi'ite [Hadith](#) he is referred to as Abu Ja'far al-Tāni.

It is unanimously agreed that he was born in Medina (Madelung's opinion, p. 396, that he was born in a village outside of Medina founded by Imam Musā al-Kāẓem is plausible, but not explicitly stated in the sources) in the year 195/811, and most [Imamite](#) scholars record his birth occurring in mid-Ramaẓān of that year. The fourth/tenth-century Hadith scholar (*moḥaddet*) Ebn 'Ayyāš, however, was of the opinion that the imam was born on the tenth of Rajab (April 8), and he even narrates a supplication attributed to the [Mahdi](#) (*al-nāḥia al-moqaddasa*) to this effect (Majlesi, XII, p. 173); on this basis the Twelver Shi'ites currently celebrate Moḥammad's birthday on this date. Moḥammad's mother, an *omm walad* (i.e., a concubine) from Nubia by the name of Sabika (or Kayzarān), was said to have descended from the family of Māria al-Qebṭia, a concubine of the Prophet and mother of his son Ebrāhim (Kolayni, II, pp. 582-83; Mofid, II, p. 273). Moḥammad al-Jawād was the only child of Imam 'Ali al-Reẓā, and contemporaries accordingly called him Ebn al-Reẓā (the son of al-Reẓā; Kolayni, II, p. 587; Kaṭib Baġdādi, IV, p. 89). At the time of his father's death in Šafar 203/August 818, Moḥammad was seven years of age, marking



the first time in Imami Shi'ism that an adult was unavailable to fill the position of imam.

The prospect of a non-adult imam brought about widespread confusion (*ḥayra*) in the community, and there was extensive debate as to whether adulthood was a necessary condition for the imamate. Those non-Imamis who pretended to support 'Ali al-Rezā in order to gain favor with the Abbasid court returned to their original groups, while those Imamis who thought it inconceivable that a minor could be the Imam either followed 'Ali al-Rezā's brother Aḥmad b. Musā (the Aḥmadiya) or adopted the belief that the imamate terminated with Musā al-Kāzem (the Wāqefiya; Nawbakṭi, p. 74; Aš'ari Qomi, pp. 93-94). After the death of Imam 'Ali al-Rezā, eighty of his leading supporters gathered in Baghdad at the house of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥajjāj, a distinguished companion of Imams al-Ṣādeq, al-Kāzem, and al-Rezā. There they decided that the son of al-Rezā was qualified to be the Imam. The supporters of Moḥammad al-Jawād argued that in the Qur'an Jesus spoke in the cradle and even received revelation while still a child, and as such there should be no objection to an Imam who is a minor. There was still disagreement among the Imamis as to whether a non-adult Imam was equal to an adult Imam in all respects, in particular whether his knowledge was derived from ordinary sources, such as teachers and books, or extraordinary ones, such as the angels. The position that prevailed was that both adult and minor Imams are equal in all respects, including the supernatural source of their knowledge (Nawbakṭi, pp. 74-76; Aš'arī Qomi, pp. 95-98).

The caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 198-218/813-33) displayed much affection towards Moḥammad al-Jawād and decided to marry him to his daughter Zaynab, known as Omm-al-Faḏl. It is disputed whether the betrothal occurred before or after the death of 'Ali al-Rezā, but in any case it displeased anti-'Alid elements of the Abbasid court (Ḥarrāni, p. 332; pseudo-Mas'udi, pp. 237-38; Majlesi, XII, p. 200). Although an isolated report states that some unnamed skeptics initially doubted Moḥammad's lineage partly on the basis of his dark skin-color, there is no evidence that this played any role in the Abbasid discontent over the betrothal. Those opposed to the betrothal connived for the Abbasid chief judge (*qāzi'l-qoḏāt*), Yaḥyā b. Akṭam, to hold religious disputations (*monāzara*) at court so as to humiliate the young Imam. The judge interrogated Moḥammad with theoretical scenarios concerning the *ḥajj* and various questions regarding religious law (*feqh*), and the Imam is said to have



triumphantly answered his difficult queries. The Imamis consider these disputations a pivotal event in Moḥammad's imamate and regularly cite them as sure signs (*dalā'el*) of his exceptional knowledge (Ḥarrāni, pp. 332-35; Mofid, II, pp. 281-88; Amin, IV, pp. 164-65).

In 210/825, al-Ma'mun, on return from Khorasan, stayed in Ray and granted its inhabitants a reduction in their land tax (*karāj*). The inhabitants of Qom appealed to al-Ma'mun to lessen the rate for them as well, but the caliph denied their request. Subsequently the people of Qom withheld the *karāj*, leading al-Ma'mun to send forces under the general 'Ali b. Hešām to stop the rebellion. After subduing the rebellion, the Abbasids raised the walls of Qom and increased the tax substantially (Ṭabari, VIII, p. 614). Moḥammad al-Jawād's attitude towards the uprising is unclear, although it seems that one of its prominent participants, Yaḥyā b. 'Emrān, was his representative (*wakil*; Hussein, p. 46). In Ṣafar 215/April 830, while staying in Takrit *en route* to a campaign in Byzantium, al-Ma'mun summoned Moḥammad from Medina and ordered him to consummate the marriage to Omm-al-Faḏl that had been arranged a number of years earlier; after participating in the *ḥajj*, the two went back to Medina. Indications that the union between the imam and the caliph's daughter was not particularly felicitous include a report from Omm-al-Faḏl to her father complaining about the marriage, as well as the fact that none of Moḥammad's offspring were from Omm-al-Faḏl. It is also a common assertion in the Imami sources that Omm-al-Faḏl poisoned Moḥammad, although Shaikh Mofid stresses there is no evidence for this claim (Majlesi, XII, p. 236; Mofid, II, p. 295; Amin, pp. 166-67, 171).

Because of the expansion of the Shi'ite population far to the east of the traditional centers in Iraq and Arabia around this time, as well as Moḥammad's young age during the first part of his imamate, the role of the *wakil* in directly overseeing the daily affairs of the Imamis increased significantly during Moḥammad's imamate (Hussein, pp. 45-47). The Imam did maintain active contact with his followers through letter writing; in one Shi'ite Hadith his father praises him for writing "extremely elegant" letters while still a young boy (Ebn Bābawayh, II, p. 240). His correspondences covered a wide variety of topics but were generally replies to questions of *feqh*, especially regarding personal matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance (for a collection of letters, see Kaḏ'ali, II, pp. 413-515). The Imami scholars attribute a wide array of miracles and extensive knowledge of the unseen to Moḥammad al-Jawād, and they also consider him the author of



pithy religio-ethical sayings (*mawā'ez wa ḥekam*; Majlesi, XII, pp. 183-99; Ḥarrāni, pp. 335-36).

When al-Mo'taşem became caliph (r. 218-27/833-42), he continued al-Ma'mun's policy of simultaneously appeasing and containing pro-'Alid groups; perhaps to further this policy, he summoned Moḥammad from Medina to Baghdad at the end of Moḥarram 220/February 835 and made him and his wife, Omm-al-Faẓl, stay at court as honored guests (Ṭabari, VIII, p. 630; Majlesi, XII, p. ...?; Hussein, p. 47). The imam died there not long after in Ḍo'l-qa'da 220/November 835 at the age of twenty-five, making him the shortest-lived of the Twelver Imams. He was buried near his grandfather Imam Musā al-Kāẓem in the cemetery of Quraysh (*maqāber Qoryš*). He was survived by two sons, 'Ali al-Hādi, the tenth imam, and Musā, known as al-Mobarqa'. Some sources mention that Moḥammad had two daughters, others say four.

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