The Nizaris, Musta'lis, Druzes and Muqanna'ah

The Nizaris. Ubaydallah al-Mahdi, who rose in North Africa in 292/904 and as an Isma'ili declared his imamate and established Fatimid rule, is the founder of the dynasty whose descendants made Cairo the center of their caliphate. For seven generations this sultanate and Isma'ili imamate continued without any divisions. At the death of the seventh Imam, al-Mustansir bi'llah Mu'idd ibn Ali, his sons, Nizar and al-Musta'li, began to dispute over the caliphate and imamate. After long disputes and bloody battle al-Musta'li was victorious. He captured his brother Nizar and placed him in prison, where he died.

Following this dispute those who accepted the Fatimids divided into two groups: the Nizaris and the Musta'lis. The Nizaris are the followers of Hasan al-Sabbah, who was one of the close associates of al-Mustansir. After Nizar's death, because of his support of Nizar, Hasan al-Sabbah was expelled from Egypt by al-Musta'li. He came to Persia and after a short while appeared in the Fort of Alamut near Qazwin. He conquered Alamut and several surrounding forts. There he established his rule and also began to invite people to the Isma'ili cause.

After the death of Hasan in 518/1124 Buzurg Umid Rudbari and after him his son, Kiya Muhammad, continued to rule following the methods and ways of Hasan al-Sabbah. After Kiya Muhammad, his son Hasan 'AlaDhikrihi'l-Salam, the fourth ruler of Alamut, changed the ways of Hasan al-Sabbah, who had been Nizari, and became Batini. Henceforth the Isma'ili forts continued as Batini. Four other

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rulers, Muhammad ibn Ala Dhikruhi'l-Salam, Jala al-Din Hasan, 'Ala' al-Din, and Rukn al-Din Khurshah, became Sultan and Imam one after another until Hulagu, the Mongol conqueror, invaded Persia. He captured Isma'ili forts and put all the Isma'ilis to death, leveling their forts to the ground.

Centuries later, in 1255/1839, the Aqa Khan of Mahalat in Persia, who belonged to the Nizaris, rebelled against Muhammad



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Shah Qajar in Kerman, but he was defeated and fled to Bombay. There he propagated his Batini-Nizari cause which continues to this day. The Nizaris are today called the Aqa Khanids.

The Musta'lis. The Musta'lis were the followers of al-Musta'li. Their imamate continued during Fatimid rule in Egypt until it was brought to an end in the year 567/1171. Shortly thereafter, the Bohra sect, following the same school, appeared in India and survives to this day.

The Druzes. The Druzes, who live in the Druze mountains in Syria (and also in Lebanon), were originally followers of the Fatimid caliphs. But as a result of the missionary activity of Nashtakin, the Druzes joined the Batini sect. The Druzes stop with the sixth Fatimid caliph al-Hakim bi'llah, whom others believe to have been killed, and claim that he is in occultation. He has ascended to heaven and will appear once again to the world.

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The Muqanna'ah. The Muqanna'ah were at first disciples of 'Ata' al-Marwi known as Muqanna', who accordingto historical sources was a follower of Abu Muslim of Khurasan. After the death of Abu Muslim, Muqanna' claimed that Abu Muslim's soul had become incarnated in him. Soon he claimed to be a prophet and later a divinity. Finally, in the year 162/777 he was surrounded in the fort of Kabash in Transoxiana. When he became certain that he would be captured and killed, he threw himself into a fire along with some of his disciples and burned to death. His followers soon adopted Isma'ilism and the ways of the Batinis.

**Differences Between Twelve-Imam Shi'ism and**

**Isma'ilism and Zaydism**

The majority of the Shi'ites, from whom the previously mentioned groups have branched out, are Twelve-Imam Shi'ites, also called the Imamites. As has already been mentioned, the Shi'ites came into being because of criticism and protest concerning two basic problems of Islam, without having any objections to the religious ways which through the instructions of the Prophet had



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become prevalent among their contemporary Muslims. These two problems concerned Islamic government and authority in the religious sciences, both of which the Shi'ites considered to be the particular right of the Household of the Prophet.

The Shi'ites asserted that the Islamic caliphate, of which esoteric guidance and spiritual leadership are inseparable

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elements, belongs to Ali and his descendants. They also believed that according to the specification of the Prophet the Imams of the Household of the Prophet are twelve in number. Shi'ism held, moreover, that the external teachings of the Quran, which are the injunctions and regulations of the Shari'ah and include the principles of a complete spiritual life, are valid and applicable for everyone at all times, and are not to be abrogated until the Day of Judgment. These injunctions and regulations must be learned through the guidance of the Household of the Prophet.

From a consideration of these points it becomes clear that the difference between Twelve-Imam Shi'ism and Zaydism is that the Zaydis usually do not consider the imamate to belong solely to the Household of the Prophet and do not limit the number of Imams to twelve. Also they do not follow the jurisprudence of the Household of the Prophet as do the Twelve-Imam Shi'ites.

The difference between the Twelve-Imam Shi'ism and Isma'ilism lies in that for the latter the imamate revolves around the number seven and prophecy does not terminate with the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Also for them, change and transformation in the injunctions of the Shari'ah are admissible, as is even rejection of the duty of following Shari'ah, especially among the Batinis. In contrast, the Twelve-Imam Shi'ites consider the Prophet to be the "seal of prophecy" and believe him to have twelve successors and executors of his will. They hold the external aspect of the Shari'ah to be valid and impossible to abrogate. They affirm that the Quran has both an exoteric and an esoteric aspect.

**Summary of the History of Twelve-Imam Shi'ism**

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As has become clear form the previous pages, the majority of Shi'ites are Twelvers. They were originally the same group of friends and supporters of Ali who, after the death of the Prophet,



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in order to defend the right of the Household of the Prophet in the question of the caliphate and religious authority, began to criticize and protest against prevalent views and separated from the majority of the people.

During the caliphate of the "rightly-guided caliphs" (11/632-35/656) the Shi'ites were under a certain amount of pressure which became much greater during the Umayyad Caliphate (40/661-132/750) when they were no longer protected in any way against destruction of their lives and property. Yet the greater the pressure placed upon them, the firmer they became in their belief. They especially benefited from their being oppressed in spreading their beliefs and teachings.

From the middle of the 2nd/8th century when the Abbasid caliphs established their dynasty, Shi'ism was able to gain a mew life as a result of the languid and weak state prevailing at that time. Soon, however, conditions became difficult once again and until the end of the 3rd/9th century became ever more stringent. At the beginning of the 4th/10th century, with the rise of the influential Buyids, who were Shi'ites, Shi'ism gained power and became more or less free to carry out its activities. It began to carry out scientific and scholarly debates

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and continued in this manner until the end of the 5th/11th century. At the beginning of the 7th/13th century when the Mongol invasion began, as a result of the general involvement in war and chaos and the continuation of the Crusades, the different Islamic governments did not put too great a pressure upon the Shi'ites. Moreover, the conversion to Shi'ism of some Mongol rulers in Persia and the rule of the Sadat-i Mar'ashi (who were Shi'ites) in Mazandaran were instrumental in the spread of the power and territory of Shi'ism. They made the presence of large concentrations of Shi'ite population in Persia and other Muslim lands felt more than ever before. This situation continued through the 9th/15th century.

At the beginning of the 10th/16th century, as a result of the rise of the Safavids, Shi'ism became the official religion of the vast territories of Persia and continues in this position to the present day. In other regions of the world also there are tens of millions of Shi'ites.



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1. Editor's note: From the general theological perspective

oflslam the "revealed religions" are those possessing Divine Scriptures and usually numbered as above. This does not, however, prevent Muslims from believing in the universality of revelation. which is particularly accented in Sufism. Whenever the situation arose, Muslims applied this principle outside the Semitic and Iranian monothe istic worlds, as for example when they encountered Hinduism whose divine origin many Muslim religious authorities admitted openly.

1. Editor's note: The Ratlwa mountains are a range located near Medina and well known for the role they played in early

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Islamic history.

1. Editor's note: It must be remembered that most of the branches cited here had very few adherents and are not in any way comparable to Twelve-Imam Shi'ism or Isma'ilism.
2. The material of this section is based on al- Milal wa'l-nihal and the Kamil of Ibn Athir.
3. The material of this section' is taken from the Kamil, Raudat al-safa-', Habib al-siyar, Abu'l-Fida-', al-Milal wa'l-nihal, and some of its details from Tarikh-i Aqa Khaniyah of Matba'i.

Najaf, 1351.

1. Editor's note: Here Sabaean refers to the people of Harran who had a religion in which stars played a major role, Moreover, they were the depository of Hermetic and Neopythagorean philosophy and played an important role in the transmission to Islam ofthe more esoteric schools of Hellenistic philosophy as well as astronomy and mathematics. They became extinct during the first few centuries of Islamic history and must not he confused with the Sabseans or Mandeans of Southern Iraq and Persia who still survive.
2. Editor's note : The term "ta'wil," which plays a cardinal role in Shi'ism as well as Sufism, means literally to return to the origin of a thing. It means to penetrate the external aspect of any reality, whether it be sacred scripture or phenomena of nature, to its inner essence, to go from the phenomenon to the noumenon.
3. Editor's note: The term "wali" in Islam means saint and wilayah as usually employed, particularly in Sufism, means sanctity. But in the context of Shi'ism, wilayah (usually pronounced walayat) means the esoteric power of the Imam whereby he is able to initiate men into the Divine Mysteries and provide for them the key to attaining sanctity. The use of the two terms, therefore, is related, since on the one hand it pertains to the saintly life aind on the other to the particular esoteric power of the Imam which leads men to the saintly life. In the case of the Imam it also has other cosmic and social connotations usually not identified with wilayah'n the general

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sense of sanctity.