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THE ROLE OF THE IMAMATE AS THE MAIN SHIITE DOGMA

Abstract. *The article provides the history of the emergence of Shiism and the definition of Shiite dogma based on the concept of the Imamate. It also examines the Shiite doctrine of the Imamate, which arose in order to substantiate the legitimacy of the rights of Ali ibn Abu Talib and his descendants to power and the thesis about the exclusive right of the descendants of the Prophet to rule over the faithful, since the rights of the descendants of Muhammad follow from the idea of the very nature of supreme power adopted by the Shiites.*

Keywords: *Ali ibn Abu Talib, Kharijites, Shiites, Umayyads, Imam, Shiite imams, Koran, Jafar al-Sadik, «Kitab al-Imam».*

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that during the time of Muhammad, Islam was a unified and monolithic religious system. After his death, a feudal-theocratic state emerged, which came to be known as the Arab Caliphate. The caliphs, considered successors of Muhammad and later representatives of Allah on earth, concentrated all secular and spiritual power in their hands. Their task was to ensure that people lived according to the Quran and Sunnah. Among Muslims, however, there arose struggles for power within the caliphate. The first caliphs were elected from among those closest to Muhammad and enjoyed great respect among Muslims. Abu Bakr (632-634), a companion of the Prophet, became the first one. Omar (634-644), recommended by the previous caliph, followed him. He successfully implemented policies aimed at spreading Islam into conquered territories such as Mesopotamia, Transcaucasia, Iran, Palestine, Syria, and Egypt was also subjugated. He was assassinated by an Iranian mercenary. Osman (644-

656) succeeded him. Under Osman's rule, Armenia, Asia Minor, and countries located in North Africa were annexed to the caliphate. During Osman's reign, the Quran was compiled, regarded as the most revered and primary manuscript source. He belonged to the wealthy Umayyad clan of the Quraysh tribe. Around him gathered relatives and like-minded individuals who he unrestrictedly appointed to governorships and high commanding positions. This led to growing discontent among the populace, expressed in demands for replacing Osman with Ali ibn Abi Talib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad through marriage to Fatima, his beloved daughter. Thus, due to internal contradictions within Muslim society, a schism occurred in the second half of the seventh century.

However, as I.V. Kulagin writes in his article "Shiite Islam and Imamat in Modern Iran," disputes over succession had already arisen between Muhammad's companions even when choosing the first caliph. At that time, only three companions of the Prophet Muhammad supported Ali (Abu Zar al-Ghifari, Mikdad ibn al-Aswad, Salman al-Farisi (ash-Shahrastani, 1984:207; Prozorov, 1980:70-80). Their opinion was not taken into account. However, under Osman's rule, increased social inequality caused dissatisfaction among the masses. It was then, during Osman's reign, that a group or party formed around supporters of Muhammad's son-in-law, husband of his favorite daughter Fatima, Ali ibn Abi Talib. His followers began to call themselves Shiat Ali ("the Party of Ali"). Hence, the name of this faction – Shiites. Known for his modesty, Ali gained immense popularity. Just as Muhammad once did, Ali embodied the struggle against dishonestly enriched co-religionists. Social justice was the main demand of Ali's supporters.

MAIN PART

In 656 AD, Ali's more radical and fanatic supporters brought militias from Kufa, Basra, and Egypt to Medina. They hoped to force Osman to voluntarily relinquish power and expected support from Ali himself. But Ali hesitated and acted hesitantly, so eventually, his supporters decided to kill Osman. To distance himself from being associated with murderers, Ali had to separate himself from many of his own supporters. Thanks to this decision, he was finally chosen as caliph. However, this choice was made solely by the citizens of Medina and representatives of the militias that had

brought Ali's supporters to Medina. In Mecca and Damascus, they refused to support Ali – including Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan, the governor of Syria (Hasan Ibn Musa an-Nawbakhti, 1973:201).

The details of the confrontation between Ali and his opponents are too extensive to describe here. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the Battle of Siffin saw the first split among Shiites. In the summer of 657 AD, Ali's army met Muawiya's forces near the Euphrates River. By the second day, Ali seemed close to victory, but Muawiya, following advice from one of his advisers, employed a ruse: he ordered scrolls of the Quran to be fixed onto soldiers' spears. Ali halted the battle and entered negotiations. It is well known that during the time of Muhammad, Islam was a unified and monolithic religious system. After his death, a feudal-theocratic state emerged, which came to be known as the Arab Caliphate. The caliphs, considered successors of Muhammad and later representatives of Allah on earth, concentrated all secular and spiritual power in their hands. Their task was to ensure that people lived according to the Quran and Sunnah. Among Muslims, however, there arose struggles for power within the caliphate. The first caliphs were elected from among those closest to Muhammad and enjoyed great respect among Muslims. Abu Bakr (632-634), a companion of the Prophet, became the first one. Omar (634-644), recommended by the previous caliph, followed him. He successfully implemented policies aimed at spreading Islam into conquered territories such as Mesopotamia, Transcaucasia, Iran, Palestine, Syria, and Egypt was also subjugated. He was assassinated by an Iranian mercenary. Osman (644-656) succeeded him. Under Osman's rule, Armenia, Asia Minor, and countries located in North Africa were annexed to the caliphate. During Osman's reign, the Quran was compiled, regarded as the most revered and primary manuscript source. He belonged to the wealthy Umayyad clan of the Quraysh tribe. Around him gathered relatives and like-minded individuals who he unrestrictedly appointed to governorships and high commanding positions. This led to growing discontent among the populace, expressed in demands for replacing Osman with Ali ibn Abi Talib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad through marriage to Fatima, his beloved daughter. Thus, due to internal contradictions within Muslim society, a schism occurred in the second half of the seventh century.

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soldier from their ranks as their leader. Generally speaking, the Kharijites advocated equality among all Muslims and rejected any form of aristocracy, including Ali. In 661 AD, Ali was murdered by a Kharijite (Kummi, 1966:177-199; Hasan Ibn Musa an-Nawbakhti, 1973:37).

Here it is worth mentioning Jules Wellhausen's words cited in I.P. Petrushevsky's book "Islam in Iran," calling Shiite and Kharijite parties "religio-political opposition" groups to the Umayyads. Subsequently, Shiites transformed into a religious movement, becoming a major branch of Islam distinct from official, broadly speaking, orthodox or mainstream Islam, whose adherents supporting the elective nature of the caliphate would come to be called Sunnis or "people of tradition and community" – ahlu-s-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a (Mussavi Lari, 1996:39).

Based on numerous traditions and allegorical interpretations of certain passages in the Quran, according to which the Prophet supposedly clearly indicated Ali as his successor and left him a spiritual testament, Shiites defended the principle of hereditary supreme authority within Ali's lineage. They firmly believed that leadership of the Muslim community must belong exclusively to imams – divinely appointed and selected figures descended from the prophet, rather than elected leaders – caliphs. Thus, the doctrine of imamate originated.

The term imamate derives from the Arabic verb amma, meaning "to stand ahead" or "lead something." Even before Islam, the word imam referred to someone standing ahead (for example, a caravan guide) or leading some enterprise. With the establishment of Islam, the word imam acquired a more specific significance: "prayer leader" or "spiritual guide," as used in the Quran. In the early years of Islam, these duties were performed by Muhammad himself, and after his death, by the caliphs. Since the caliph was both prayer leader and head of state with all accompanying powers, the caliph-imam effectively became the sole legislator and highest spiritual authority, holding ultimate control over both temporal and spiritual matters. Therefore, the function of the imam – the imamate – can be defined as supreme leadership of the Islamic community-state (Kulagin, 2013:269; Prozorov, 2004:15).

However, prior to the first schism in the Muslim community, triggered by Usman's assassination and subsequent intensification of power struggles, the term imamate was not used to denote supreme authority. Neither the Quran nor Hadiths dating back to

Muhammad's era and the period of the "rightly guided" caliphs mention this word. The term *imamate* seems to have been introduced specifically during what is commonly termed the First Civil War, when new political forces joined the fight for power – notably the Kharijites – elevating the conflict to a qualitatively different level.

Intensive development of the doctrine of *imamate* began with treatises justifying Alid claims to supreme authority. Ideological battles towards the end of the Umayyad dynasty found expression primarily in commentaries on the Quran, which became the principal ideological weapon in the struggle for power. Interpretation of certain Quranic verses favoring Ali and his descendants took on political resonance. Pro-Alid exegetes attempted to sway public opinion using the authority of Scripture toward securing power for the Alids.

One of the earliest proponents of this idea was Jabir ibn Yazid al-Djufi (d. 128/745 CE), a historian and Quranic commentator from Kufa, interpreting certain Quranic verses as referring to Ali ibn Abi Talib (Petrushchevsky, 1966:21; Kummi, 1966:37).

The elaboration of the doctrine of *imamate* was undertaken less by the imams themselves than by theologians among their followers. Intense work in this area took place in the first half of the eighth century, particularly during debates organized by Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765 CE). Debate outcomes were reflected in polemical and theoretical works authored by pro-Alid scholars. The central objective of early pro-Alid theological literature was to justify Alid claims to the *imamate*. Works defending Alid superiority rights to supreme authority and developing theoretical foundations of the *imamate* were titled *Kitab al-Imama* («Book on *Imamate*»), *Kitab Isbat* (alternately *Ihthijaj*, *Dalail*) *al-Imama* («Proofs of *Imamate*») or *Kitab al-Wasaya* («Book of Testaments»). Notable authors include the Kufan theologian Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Ahwal (d. 160/777 CE) and Baghdad-based theologian Isa ibn Rawda, maula of Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (r. 136/754–158/775) (Petrushchevsky, 1966:21).

CONCLUSION

Pro-Alid theologians derived the key arguments substantiating the necessity of *imamate*, its divine origin, and its belonging to Ali's lineage principally from the Quran and Hadiths. Given the absence of direct references to Ali in the Quran, pro-Alid exegetes resorted to allegorical interpretation of individual Quranic expressions. For

instance, citing Imams Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 114/732 CE) and Ja'far al-Sadiq, they claimed that the Quranic verse "My covenant does not encompass wrongdoers" implies imamate. Additionally, pro-Alid supporters contended that when Zayd ibn Thabit was commissioned in 651 CE to compile a complete list of Muhammad's sermons, he omitted all verses explicitly mentioning Ali and his rightful claim to succeed the Prophet Muhammad. On similar grounds, they questioned the authenticity of several surahs and viewed the so-called Osmanic edition of the Quran as possibly falsified.

Shiite tradition preserves multiple Hadiths containing, according to Shiites, clear indications (nass) that Muhammad designated Ali as his successor (khalifa), custodian of revelation (amin al-wahi), imam, and amir al-muminin. An example is the statement attributed to Muhammad, allegedly delivered in Ghadir al-Khumm: «Whoever I am master of, Ali is also his master.» Another Hadith often quoted by Shiites recounts how Muhammad, summoning his closest family members and tribesmen while pointing to young Ali, declared: «This is my brother, my heir (vasi), and my deputy (khalifa) after me. Listen to him and obey him!» Some other narrations presented by Shiites compare Ali to Aaron relative to Moses, emphasizing that no further prophets will follow Muhammad.

Thus, efforts by pro-Alid theologians culminated in establishing the belief that supreme authority – the imamate – belongs to Ali's lineage by divine decree. Yet initially, no single method for transferring the imamate within Ali's line was established, and as the Alid clan naturally divided itself, the number of potential contenders for supreme authority grew.

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