

How authentic is the Hadith of the Twelve Caliphs after the Prophet (S)?

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It has become common to cite the famous '12 Caliph/Ruler' Ḥadīth found in Sunnī sources as evidence that bolsters and strengthens the Twelver Imāmī belief that Imamate after Prophet Moḥammad (Saww) runs in 12 Imams from his family.^[1]

However, what many fail to realise is that the Sunnī version of this Ḥadīth has several features associated with it which make it unhelpful to the Twelver Imāmī Shī'a case for a number of very obvious reasons which we

shall endeavor to point out during the course of this discussion.

Firstly, this alleged Ḥadīth is known to have only mysteriously surfaced in the Umayyad period within proto-Sunnī Ḥadīth circles. There is no trace or reliable evidence of it having been recognised as a valid or authentic Ḥadīth by any of the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as) or their Shī'a prior to the occultation. There is thus no objectively authentic Shī'a chain of transmission for it to any of the Imams (as) or to the Prophet (Saww) as one would expect such a Ḥadīth that is so crucial for the Shī'a to be. Its primary transmitter to whom it can be reliably traced back in the works of Ahl al-Sunnah is Jābir b. Samurah^[2], who is known for his pro-Umayyad proclivities.

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This alleged Ḥadīth is also Khabar al-Wāhid, meaning that it is entirely solitary in transmission due to the fact that no one claimed to directly hear such a narration from the Prophet (Saww) besides him. To worsen matters, those who narrate from him are Shāmīs (from the Levant) and stand accused of being Nawāṣib (i.e. people whose religiously hate the Ahlul Bayt (as)).

On top of that, Jābir bin Samurah is believed to have been hardly six or seven years old when he supposedly heard this Ḥadīth. Closer examination of the text, context and background surrounding the emergence of this Ḥadīth reveals that it was most likely fabricated to prop up the Umayyad rulers and justify their unjust rule at a time when they faced growing public resentment and political crisis.

The latest critical Sunnī Ḥadīth scholarship has also indicated that this Ḥadīth is most likely fabricated and inauthentic. This has been confirmed by the foremost and pre-eminent Sunni Ḥadīth critic and Rijāl expert in our contemporary time, al-Sayyid al-‘Allāmah al-Sharīf ‘Addāb Maḥmūd al-Ḥusaynī^[3]. However, interestingly, the Twelver Imāmī sources also preserve for us very compelling evidence that convincingly demonstrates that this alleged Ḥadīth was never recognised as a valid or authentic Ḥadīth by any of the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (as) from the Twelver or Zaydī line, nor did the early Shī‘a or Imāmīyyah ever think that it could be referring to their Imams (as), most likely because they could clearly see that its text had been doctored to prop up the authority and rule of the Umayyads, and not that of any Imams from the Ahlul Bayt (as).

PROOF FROM TWELVER SOURCES THAT THE TWELVE CALIPH/RULER ḤADĪTH IS FABRICATED

A very simple yet remarkably compelling proof that the 12 Caliph Ḥadīth was not recognised as an authentic Prophetic Ḥadīth among the early Shī‘a prior to the occultation, and that it was never understood to be a reference to the 12 Imams which the Twelver Imāmīs later came to believe in until after the occultation, is found in the reports which deal with the emergence of the Wāqifah Imāmī Shī‘a sect after the demise of the 7th Imam from the Twelver line of Imams, Mūsā bin Ja‘far

al-Kāzīm (as) (d. 183 AH). Before we look at how these reports lead us to this conclusion, it would be instructive to shed some light on who the Wāqifah were and what their primary claim was so that we may be able to better appreciate how their case serves as such compelling evidence of the falsity of this alleged Ḥadīth.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND FOR THE EMERGENCE OF THE WĀQIFAH SECT

The Wāqifah were an Imāmī Shī‘a sub-sect who broke away from the rest of the Shī‘a al-Imāmīyyah after the demise of the 7th Imam Mūsā b. Ja‘far al-Kāzīm (as) in the year 183 AH. This break-away sect was actually founded by the top financial agents and representatives of the 7th Imam (as) who were also some of the most learned and knowledgeable companions of the previous Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (as) (d. 148 AH). It was most likely due to their vast knowledge and status as long-time disciples of the 6th Imam (as) that the 7th Imam (as) handpicked them and appointed them as his representatives and trustees to oversee and administer the funds that the Shī‘a would routinely contribute to the office of the Imamate in order to enable it to function properly and provide support to poor Shī‘a families.

However, by the time of the 7th Imam’s death, these agents and representatives had amassed so much wealth and had received such huge amounts of funds from the Shī‘a in the name of the 7th Imam (as) that they couldn’t bear the thought of relinquishing control over them and handing them over to the next Imam, ‘Alī bin Mūsā al-Riḍā (as) (d. 203 AH). However, since Imam al-Riḍā (as) was not facing any imprisonment or threat from the state at the time, he saw no need for these agents to administer and manage these funds on his behalf, rather he sought to have them surrendered to him so that he could dispose of them as he saw fit, in his capacity as the successor of his father^[4].

To avoid having to hand over these massive funds to Imam al-Riḍā (as), the financial agents and representatives of his father resorted firstly to denying the death of Imam al-Kāzīm (as)^[5] since they figured that such a denial was the best means of ensuring that they retained control of his office, and enabling them to continue their work of collecting funds in his name as they had been doing in his lifetime. However, this was thwarted by Imam al-Riḍā (as)’s move of collecting eyewitness testimonies affirming the death, funeral and burial of Imam al-Kāzīm (as) and

sending them over to these agents as proof that he had definitely died, and that they could, therefore, no longer continue to serve as his agents and representatives within the community. When they found themselves cornered, the agents argued that even if it could be proved that Imam al- Kāzīm (as) had died, he had issued them no instruction about transferring any funds to Imam al- Riḍā (as), and thus they were under no legal or moral obligation to do so. They thus rejected his authority and refused to accept him as an Imam.

Instead, they came up with the claim that the 7th Imam, i.e. Mūsā b. Ja‘far al-Kāzīm (as) was the last and final Imam, and that he was the Qāim (the one who would rise) and the Mahdī who would emerge at the end of time to establish justice in the world after it would be overcome with injustice and oppression. Because they ‘stopped’ at the 7th Imam (as), ended the Imamate at him, and refused to acknowledge any further Imams from the Ahlul Bayt (as) after him, they came to be known as the *Wāqifah* or the *Wāqifiyyah* (from the Arabic word ‘*Waqf*’ which literally means ‘to stop/pause/halt’.)

That their motive for forming this rival sub-sect was purely financial and pecuniary in nature, (i.e. they were motivated to deny the death of the 7th Imam (as) and seal the institution of Imamate with him by greed and a desire to retain control over the vast financial resources and property they had acquired in their capacity as agents and representatives of the 7th Imam (as)) is confirmed by the testimony of Yūnus bin ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, the close companion and disciple of Imam al-Riḍā (as)^[6]. This is so because they understood only too well that if they admitted that Imamate was going to continue after Imam al-Kāzīm (as) in his progeny and through his offspring, they would have to surrender the funds under their control to the next Imam, and thus denial of the 7th Imam’s death and ending Imamate at him with the claim he was the last and final Imam, as well as the Mahdī in occultation served as the best, most convenient and effective cop out to evade the prospect of having to surrender vast financial resources together with all the power, authority and clout that came along with it to the 8th Imam (as).

HOW EARLY ANTI-WĀQIFITE REFUTATIONS PROVE THE FALSITY OF THE 12 CALIPH ḤADĪTH AND DEMONSTRATE THAT SHĪ‘AS NEVER THOUGHT OF IT AS BEING INDICATIVE OF THE 12 IMAMS

When Imam al-Riḍā (as) assumed the responsibilities of his father, his first biggest and most significant challenge was to refute the false claim of the Wāqifah as he could clearly see that they were abusing the trust reposed in them by his father, misappropriating and embezzling funds collected in his name, and spreading their false claim through propaganda and buying people out, not to mention establishing a deviant sect around a false belief that Imam al-Kāzim (as) had not died, that he was the Qāim and the Mahdī, and that he was the last and final Imam from the Ahlul Bayt (as), and that he had gone into occultation and would appear just shortly before the end of time to establish the government of justice and eradicate all injustice and oppression from this world.

Had the Prophet (Saww) really said anything to the effect of their being 12 Imams for the Muslims in the future, and had this been well-known and widely disseminated as an authentic and reliable Ḥadīth in Muslim, particularly Shī‘a circles of Ḥadīth, the Wāqifah would have not dared to claim that Imamate had ended at the 7th Imam (as) because they would know that their claim would be untenable and unacceptable due to it being in direct contradiction with such a well-established, widely recognised, and mass transmitted Prophetic Ḥadīth. But supposing they somehow forgot about it in their rush to come up with a seemingly valid pretext for rejecting the leadership of Imam al-Riḍā (as), it is inconceivable that Imam al-Riḍā (as) and his supporters would fail to deploy such a Ḥadīth against the Wāqifites especially given how powerful, effective and useful it would have been in undermining and wiping out their deviant claim (i.e. that the 7th Imam (as) was the last Imam from the Ahlul Bayt (as)) right from its very foundation and nipping it in the bud.

Yet, there is not a shred of evidence in any early and reliable Twelver, Zaydī, or Sunnī pre-occultation source to indicate that Imam al-Riḍā (as) or any of his supporters ever cited the 12 Caliph Ḥadīth or any of its variants in order to discredit and disprove the claim of the Wāqifites that there were only 7 Imams from the Ahlul Bayt (as), and that Imamate ended at the 7th from among them, and that he was the last and final Imam.

Surely, if any version of the 12 Caliph Ḥadīth had been truly a Prophetic statement, and if it had been understood by the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as) or any of their early pre-occultation Shī'as to be a reference to the 12 Imams which the Twelvers of later times settled on, then surely the emergence of the Wāqifah subsect was the perfect time and opportunity to draw attention to, and promote, this 12 Caliph or 12 Ruler Ḥadīth.

Had this 12 Caliph Ḥadīth been true, and had it been actually a reference to the 12 Imams which the Twelvers later settled on, Imam al-Riḍā (as) or at least his someone from among his close disciples and supporters would have drawn attention to it in order to convince the Wāqifites of the falsity and mendacity of their claim that Imamate had ended at the 7th Imam (as).

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WHY THE TAQIYYAH CARD DOES NOT WORK HERE?

It cannot be argued that the Imam (as) and his Shī'a refrained from citing the 12 Caliph Ḥadīth against the Wāqifites due to Taqiyyah (dissimulation) because this Ḥadīth was being transmitted in proto-Sunnī and Sunnī circles of Ḥadīth so there was no need to observe Taqiyyah with regard to a Ḥadīth that was already being transmitted in Sunnī circles of Ḥadīth. Also the 12 Caliph/ruler Ḥadīth does not name them by name, so merely referring to it and pointing out how it demolishes the claim of the Wāqifites, assuming the 12 Caliphs is a reference to the 12 Imams, would not endanger the life or limb of any future Imam (as) since even after narrating this Ḥadīth and citing

it, the identity of the future Imams would still remain hidden and unknown. But the claim of the Wāqifah would still be exposed for the lie that it was.

In view of the above, there is simply no plausible explanation for why Imam al-Riḍā (as) and his contemporary Shī‘a supporters failed to cite the 12 Caliph/ruler narration in their refutations of the Wāqifites other than the fact that they were not aware of any authentic narration from the Prophet (Saww) limiting Imamah to 12 personalities from his progeny.

WHY THE 12 CALIPH ḤADĪTH IN SUNNĪ SOURCES DOESN'T FAVOUR THE TWELVER IMĀMĪ SHĪ‘A CASE

A key reason why Imam al-Riḍā (as) and his supporters from among the Shī‘a would have not used the 12 Caliph Ḥadīth that was being circulated in proto-Sunnī Ḥadīth circles in their time, assuming they were aware of it, is that the way the Ḥadīth is phrased in Sunnī transmissions is not favourable to the Shī‘a case at all. It is clear from its very phrasing and vocabulary that it is a piece of Umayyad propaganda designed to legitimize Umayyad rule by tying the glory of Islam and the flourishing of its polity to it.

Imam al-Riḍā (as) and his Shī‘a would have known that this alleged Ḥadīth was an Umayyad fabrication due to it emphasizing two aspects which only a fabricator with a Pro-Umayyad bias would seek to promote, namely, (1) that these 12 rulers would actually **rule over** the Ummah, unlike the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (as) who didn't get to rule the Ummah with the exception of Imams ‘Alī and al-Ḥasan (ahs), and (2) stressing that they would all be from Quraish, which would be completely counter-productive to the Shī‘a case, because it would be highly unwise for the Prophet (Saww) to say that these Twelve would be from Quraish if he had personalities from his immediate progeny in mind, for the simple reason that Quraish is too broad an umbrella which encompasses even tribes like Banū Umayyah, as well as the tribes of the first three Caliphs, and it would therefore be a dangerously loose and flexible descriptor to say that these Twelve would be from Quraish if the Prophet (Saww) only intended to refer to Imam ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib (as) and 11 other Imams from the offspring he had with Sayyidah Fāṭimah (as). For the Prophet (Saww) to declare that all these Caliphs would be from Quraish would open the door for everyone from the Banū Umayyah as well as the tribes of the first three Caliphs to lay claim to this prophecy and declare themselves Maṣāḍiq (deserving candidates) of it.

Thus, if the Prophet (Saww) wanted to restrict the Caliphate to Imam ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib (as) and descendants from his progeny, he would never say they will be from Quraish as that would be too broad a description, and would allow too many false pretenders to claim it for themselves, including corrupt rulers from the Banū Umayyah, as they would also come under Quraish. It wouldn’t even be sufficient to say they will be from Banū Hāshim as that would open the door for the Banū ‘Abbās to stake a claim to it as they are also from the Banū Hāshim by virtue of being the descendants of al- ‘Abbās bin ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the uncle of the Prophet (Saww). The Prophet (Saww) would have to be way more specific in that Ḥadīth and use a descriptor that would seal the door for any false pretenders to the caliphate.

Even if the Prophet (Saww) said that they would all be descendants of Sayyidah Fāṭimah (as), that would still leave the door open for Zaydī claimants to Imamate from among the descendants of Imams al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (ahs), which would be unhelpful, nay detrimental, to the Twelver claim. The Twelver claim is so narrow that perhaps nothing short of naming the actual 12 Imams would favour their case, and the Ḥadīth of 12 Caliphs in Sunnī sources is a very far cry away from that. It therefore is of no use to the Twelver Shī‘a case, and the fact that they resorted to appropriating it to bolster their claim during the *‘Āṣr al-Ḥayrah* (period of bewilderment and confusion) that began after the demise of Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (d. 260 AH) indicates how utterly desperate the Twelver Imāmīyyah of that period really were and how they were prepared to clutch at straws to uphold their claim even if it meant misappropriating the sectarian pro-Umayyad fabrications of their rival and opposing sects^[7].

It is therefore abundantly clear that the fabricator behind the 12 Caliph Ḥadīth has no sympathy for the Ahlul Bayt (as) and no desire to draft his fabricated Ḥadīth in a way that would uniquely favour the Ahlul Bayt’s (as) claim to the Caliphate. Rather, it is vividly clear from the way the fabricator tailored the text of the 12 Caliph Ḥadīth, and from his insistence on the term *ما وليهم* to indicate that the Caliphs he is referring to will actually rule over the Muslims, and that they will be from Quraish, that he was simply aiming to legitimize the rule of the Banū Umayyah because of the following factors:

1. This Ḥadīth only emerged and began to circulate in the Umayyad period.
2. In many of its formulations, it stipulates that these Twelve Caliphs will actually rule the Ummah politically (which is something that holds true for the Umayyad Caliphs, but not for any of the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (as) beyond Imam al-Ḥasan (as)).
3. The Ḥadīth's claim and insistence that all of these Caliphs will be from Quraish – which is a qualifier too broad to be useful and favourable for the Shī'a but inclusive enough to be beneficial to the Banū Umayyah in whose favour it is being fabricated.

For this reason, we have concluded that this Ḥadīth, while definitely fabricated, is not a Shī'a or Imāmī or even Twelver fabrication, but rather a pro-Umayyad fabrication designed and tailored to legitimize their rule and give a boost to their faltering and declining power, influence and popularity ratings after they began to wane.

IMAM AL-RIDĀ'S (AS) REFUTATION OF THE WĀQIFITES – THE FINAL DEATH BLOW TO NOT JUST THE WĀQIFITE CREED, BUT ALSO THE TWELVER CLAIM OF OCCULT IMAMATE.

Imam al-Riḍā (as) did issue a historic and powerful statement refuting the key assertions of the Wāqifites, but what's really interesting and remarkably striking about his refutation of them is that it not only logically destroys and rationally dismantles the Wāqifite claim, but that it also ends up severely undermining, nay destroying and dismantling the whole foundation of all future occultation based claims about hidden Imams who are miraculously kept alive until the day of judgement to serve as God's Ḥujjah on earth, including the current day Twelver narrative about the birth, longevity and continued occultation of the 12th Imam Moḥammad bin al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (b. c. 868 CE/255 AH).

مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْحَسَنِ الْبَرَاثِيُّ: قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي أَبُو عَلِيٍّ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي يَعْقُوبُ بْنُ يَزِيدَ، عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ أَبِي عُمَيْرٍ إِلَّا مَا رُوِيَ لَكَ وَلَكِنْ حَدَّثَنِي ابْنُ أَبِي عُمَيْرٍ عَنْ رَجُلٍ مِنْ أَصْحَابِنَا قَالَ: قُلْتُ لِلرِّضَا (ع) جُعِلَتْ فِدَاكَ قَوْمٌ قَدْ وَقَفُوا عَلَى أَبِيكَ يَزْعُمُونَ أَنَّهُ لَمْ يَمُتْ، قَالَ: قَالَ: كَذَبُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ (ص)، وَلَوْ كَانَ اللَّهُ يُمَدُّ فِي أَجَلٍ أَحَدٍ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ لِحَاجَةِ الْخَلْقِ إِلَيْهِ لَدَّ اللَّهُ فِي أَجَلِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (ص)

Muḥammad bin al-Ḥasan al-Barāthī said: Abū 'Alī narrated to me, and said: Ya'qūb bin Yazīd narrated to me from Muḥammad bin Abī 'Umayr, except what has been narrated to you. However, Ibn Abī 'Umayr narrated to me from a man among our companions who said: I said to al-Riḍā

(peace be upon him): ‘May I be your ransom! There are people who claim that your father did not die.’ He said the Imam (as) replied saying: ‘They have lied, and they are disbelievers in what Allah Almighty has revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Saww). **If Allah were to extend the life of anyone from among the Banī Adam (children of Adam, i.e. human beings) due to the need of the creation towards him, He would have extended the life of the Messenger of Allah (Saww).**’^[8]

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Imam al-Riḍā (as)

The first remarkable thing about this highly logical and rational refutation of the claim of the Wāqifites about the occultation of Imam al-Kāzīm (as) and the assertion that Allah (SWT) would miraculously prolong his life until a time close to the day of judgement is that its wording is so general and the principle laid out in it is so universal that it not only negates the possibility of a miraculously prolonged period of occultation for Imam al-Kāzīm (as), but for any Imam after him as well, since the same principle would apply to him as there is simply no human being, regardless of whether he or she may be from the progeny of the Prophet (Saww) or from any other progeny, who could be more deserving than the Prophet (Saww) of being miraculously kept alive until the day of judgement for the sake of the guidance and welfare of the creation. So if Allah (SWT) really had a slot reserved for one person to be miraculously and supernaturally kept alive until the day of judgement so that he may be able to serve as a Ḥujjah (proof) of God against the people and an Imām (guide) for them, it is inconceivable that He would favour or prefer anyone for it over and above the Prophet Moḥammad (Saww).

The second striking feature of the refutation issued by Imam al-Riḍā (as) against the claim of the Wāqifah is that it very clearly and conspicuously betrays the fact that the Imam (as) was not aware of any authentic Ḥadīth from the Prophet (Saww) indicating that **there would be Twelve**

Imams from his progeny who would be Divinely Appointed and infallible, and the ones whose obedience would be obligatory and binding on the Ummah. Because if the Imam (as) had received any such narration through his golden chain to the Prophet (Saww) or if such a Ḥadīth had been widely transmitted among the Shī'as of his time, the Imam (as) and those Shī'a loyal to him would not shied away from brandishing it and cornering the Wāqifah with it, as it would be a very effective refutation of their claim that Imamate had stopped at the 7th Imam (as). Any narration that claims 12 Imams from the progeny of the Prophet could be used to show the Wāqifites that they were mistaken in their claim that Imamate had ended at the 7th Imam, since the narration of 12 Imams would be sufficient to show that there were still five more Imams to come, of whom Imam al-Riḍā (as) would just the first.

The complete and very conspicuous absence of any use of any kind of narration that says there will be 12 Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (Saww) or 11 from that of Imam 'Alī (as) and Sayyidah Fāṭimah (as), or 9 from the progeny of Imam al-Ḥusayn (as), definitively shows that no such narration existed in the time of Imam al-Riḍā (as), and the Shī'as of the time were not Twelvers, and in fact, had no clue that Imamate would mysteriously and abruptly end at 11 or 12 Imams. Therefore, it can be concluded with a considerable degree of historical certainty that all such narrations which claim 12 Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (Saww) or 11 from that of Imam 'Alī (as) and Sayyidah Fāṭimah (as), or 9 from the progeny of Imam al-Ḥusayn (as) – are ahistorical fabrications of the post-occultation period, invented by desperate sectarian elements within the Twelver Imāmī fringe group who ended Imamate at a hidden 12th Imam after failing to find any viable and suitable candidate to fill in the vacuum left by the sudden death of Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī (as).

In a way the Twelver fringe group did not invent a new claim from scratch when they found themselves at a dead end after the death of the 11th Imam (as). Rather, the financial representatives of the 11th Imam (as) and their network of agents resorted to the tried and tested tactic of the Wāqifite financial representatives and agents of the 7th Imam (as). They simply borrowed the precise key claims the Wāqifites had made about the 7th Imam (as), namely, that he had not died, but was alive, and that he was in occultation due to fear for his life and in order to ensure his safety and well-being, and that he would be miraculously kept alive by Allah (SWT) until a time close to the day of judgement at which point he would emerge from hiding and establish a global

government ushering an era of universal justice, fairness, and a complete elimination of all evil and injustice from this earth.

The financial motives of the financial representatives of the 11th Imam (as) also appear similar to those of the financial representatives of the 7th Imam (as). It is abundantly clear from the reports about the financial representatives of the 7th Imam (as) which were discussed before that they were motivated to invent a new sub-sect around the claim that the 7th Imam (as) had gone into occultation precisely so as to avoid having to acknowledge the leadership and authority of the next Imam in line, i.e. Imam ‘Alī al-Riḍā (as), because accepting him would mean having to relinquish control over the vast financial resources and funds that they had amassed during the time of Imam al-Kāzīm (as), and facing the prospect of having to surrender all power, authority and control to Imam al-Riḍā (as).

The financial representatives of the 11th Imam (as) faced the exact same prospect. Because there was no apparent son who stepped up to succeed him, his brother, Ja‘far bin ‘Alī, rose to assume control of the office of the Imamate. However, acknowledging his Imamate would mean having to surrender all control, power, authority, and financial resources to him, and giving all that up – something that history teaches us was often the greatest and most scary nightmare for financial representatives of the Imams (as), as the case of Imam al-Kāzīm’s (as) representatives only too painfully demonstrates. When faced with such a prospect, the financial representatives of the 7th Imam (as) were so desperate to hold on to their power and control that they felt they would rather found a new deviant rival subsect that would deny the very death of Imam al-Kāzīm and claim a miraculously orchestrated occultation for him rather than surrender power to the natural heir and successor of the deceased Imam (as), i.e. his charismatic and noble son: Imam ‘Alī al-Riḍā (as).

However, there was a notable difference as well. In the case of the Wāqifites, their claims were severely undermined by what people saw of the overwhelming knowledge, piety, asceticism, and virtue of Imam al-Riḍā (as). This caused many of those who had previously fallen for the claim of the Wāqifites to review their decision, repent, and rally behind Imam al-Riḍā (as) as the rightful successor to his father and head of the Shī‘a community worthy of being followed. In the case of the financial representatives of the 11th Imam (as), initially the vast majority of the Shī‘a were skeptical about their claim that there was a son who had been born to the 11th Imam (as) in

secrecy, and that he was now in occultation, and thus they are said to have overwhelmingly rallied behind the brother of the 11th Imam, Ja‘far bin ‘Alī, as the rightful heir and successor of the deceased Imam (as)^[9]. However, Ja‘far bin ‘Alī did not command the kind of charisma and attractive force that Imam al-Riḍā (as) had commanded, nor did he exhibit a high level of knowledge, wisdom, piety, sagacity or virtue. He also didn’t live for too long, and after him, his Shī‘as followed his son, ‘Alī Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī. However, due to the lack of any charismatic Imams down the line, the followers of Ja‘far switched over to other sects.

In the final analysis, it is abundantly clear from a close and critical reading of the earliest sources that the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (as) and their contemporary Shī‘a prior to occultation had no concept of Twelverism or there being twelve Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (Saww). The general expectation was that there would always be an eminently learned and erudite scholar from among the Ahlul Bayt (as) around whom the Shī‘a would be able to rally, and that this chain of Imamate would continue in perpetuity. However, vested financial interests combined with the failure of the Twelver line of Imamate to produce more charismatic and knowledgeable personalities who could mobilise the Shī‘a and unite them in following them resulted in the Imamate being capped at Twelve Imams for the Twelvers with the Twelfth Imam being in placed conveniently in occultation so as to block any questions or queries about details of his birth and existence, while Zaydī and Ismāīlī Imamate endured without resorting to any claim of occultation.

Due to the fact that the historical sources of the first two centuries after Hijrah are so clear in showing that there existed no concept of Twelverism and no anticipation of Imamate getting capped at Twelve Imams, critical scholarship of Twelver Imāmī Shī‘a Ḥadīth and Rijāl regards all narrations which contain any mention of Twelve Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (Saww) as ahistorical fabrications and later interpolations. This can be seen from the admission of the renowned Iranian Twelver Imāmī Shī‘a Ḥadīth and Rijāl expert, ‘Allāmah Moḥammad Bāqir al-Bahbūdī (d. 2015 CE), who wrote:

على أنك قد عرفت في بحث الشذوذ عن نظام الإمامة أنّ الأحاديث المرويّة في النصوص على الأئمة جملة من خبر اللوح وغيره- كلها مصنوعة في عهد الغيبة والحيرة وقبلها بقليل، فلو كانت هذه النصوص المتوفرة موجودة عند الشيعة الإمامية لما اختلفوا في معرفة الأئمة الطاهرة هذا الاختلاف الفاضح، ولما

وقعت الحيرة لأساطين المذهب وأركان الحديث سنوات عديدة، وكانوا في غنى أن يتسرّعوا إلى تأليف الكتب لإثبات الغيبة وكشف الحيرة عن قلوب الأمة بهذه الكثرة.

“You have already known by now from the discussion surrounding the aberrations in the system of Imamate that **ALL of the Aḥādīth (narrations and reports) that serve as texts for designating the Imams, including the Khabar al-Lawḥ (Report of the Tablet), are all fabrications that were forged during the period of occultation and bewilderment, or shortly before it.** For if these abundant texts had been in circulation among the Imāmī Shī‘a (since the beginning), there would not have been such sharp and flagrant disagreement in determining and identifying the pure Imams in each of their periods of Imamate. This evident discord would not have occurred, and the confusion among the top learned authorities of the sect and the experts of Ḥadīth would not have persisted for so many years. They would have had no reason to rush to compile books in such large numbers to prove the occultation and dispel the confusion from the hearts of the community.”^[10]

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‘Allāmah Moḥammad Bāqir al-Bahbūdī

Professor Hossein Modarressi’s research also supports the conclusion that the “Twelve Caliph Ḥadīth never attracted the attention of the Imāmites until the late third/ninth century. He even points out that the Imāmīyyah in the first decades of the claimed occultation believed that the Imamate would continue its normal path in the descendants of Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (as).

According to him, it was most likely not until after 295 AH/908 CE, when it began to dawn on them that the situation was more unusual than what they had originally thought it to be and that they wouldn't have a visible, apparent and accessible Imam for the foreseeable future, that they began to seriously consider the question of the number of Imams, although many may have guessed and some reports may have started to circulate before that date. Notwithstanding, he pinpoints the two prominent Shi'ite traditionalists of the early fourth/tenth century, Moḥammad bin Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī and 'Alī bin Bābawayh al-Qummī, both of whom died in the late third decade of that century, as the 'first among those Imāmite authors whose works have survived to put forward the idea' of there being only Twelve Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (Saww) whose Imamate one needs to believe in.^[11]

CONCLUSION

In summary, the 12 Caliph/Ruler Ḥadīth was never used by any Imāmī sect up until the post-occultation period, even though there erupted controversies pertaining to the Imamate such as the one introduced by the Wāqifites in which such a Ḥadīth would have proved highly effective in convincing the Shi'a of the error and deviation of the Wāqifites.

It is clearly because this concept of the 'Twelve Imams' came to be associated with the Imāmī belief system at a much later stage in the late third and early fourth century, and the Imāmīs before that had no idea that Imamate would end at 12 Imams, because they had no concept of a future occultation, rather they thought that Imamate would continue in the Prophetic bloodline in perpetuity. However, when the 11th Imam (as) died without an apparent son, the Imāmīyyah sect fell into crisis with a sizeable majority maintaining that Imamate had shifted to Ja'far and from him to his son, while a fringe group that mobilized around the financial representatives and agents of the 11th Imam (as) claimed that he has a son who was in hiding and that he was the next Imam.

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Faced with confusion, crisis and an era of bewilderment that lasted well over a century, the Imāmīs (who had been influenced by Ghuluww substantially by then) were desperate to find a way to rescue their deeply held belief that the earth would never be empty of a Ḥujjah of God on earth. But Imam al-ʿAskarī (as) dying childless, for all practical purposes, left them between a rock and a hard place in terms of explaining how and why their theory of the earth always having an Imam of guidance had failed. They couldn't play the Badā card again here as they had done in the past when their expectations regarding who would succeed to the office of the Imamate had failed them. The reason is because Imam al-ʿAskarī (as) left them without any apparent biological sons to predicate Imāmah to, unlike previous Imams in whose cases there were usually other sons they could rally around.

Unable to deploy the Badā card, they resorted to plugging in another age-old concept of an Imam in Ghaybah (occultation) which had served break-away sects such as the Kaysāniyyah, Nāwūsīyyah^[12], and the Wāqifiyyah very well in the past, and enabled them to justify their rejection of any further Imams from the Ahlul Bayt (as). The Twelvers had to resort to this option, for as the learned Shaykh Moḥammad al-Sharīfī eloquently puts it, it was either to opt for occultation or capitulation.^[13]

This is so because if they admitted that Imamate had ended abruptly without there being any other viable candidate to assume this office, the very foundation of their theological and Imamological edifice would crumble, because these people had built the whole idea of Divine Imāmah on the premise that God was obligated to appoint a guide and leader for the Muslim Ummah in every age after the Prophet (Saww) as was not in keeping with Divine Justice and Luṭf (Care for Creation) for God to leave the Ummah rudderless, or to keep the earth devoid of a Ḥujjah of God, for it would implode and self-destruct in that event according to their superstition.

Admitting that the 11th Imam (as) had indeed died childless, and that there was really no viable Divinely appointed Imam after him whom they could turn to for guidance and leadership, would have exposed the falsity of their original claim concerning the institution of Divine Imāmah after

the Prophet (Saww). For if Allah (SWT) could leave the Ummah without any Divinely Appointed Imam and Hujjah on earth in the year 260 AH after the passing away of Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (as), He could certainly do the same in the year 11 AH with the passing away of Prophet Moḥammad (Saww). For if the system of Divinely Appointed leaders and guides had to come to an end, there is no real or valid compelling reason why 11 AH would be a less suitable year to do that than 260 AH.

In fact, the very decision of the Almighty to declare Moḥammad (Saww) the ‘seal of the Prophets’ in the Qur’ān was an announcement of the fact that the system of Divine Appointment was coming to an end, for if God really wanted to continue appointing religious guides and leaders for the Ummah, there was no good reason for sealing the tried, tested, and fully functioning institution of Prophethood and Messengership. Even if the Dīn had been completed, more Prophets could be sent in every age to uphold, establish, and defend the completed religion, and also to demonstrate how to interpret Divine Revelations with changing times. The completion of the Dīn, in and of itself, by no means logically necessitates the closure and shutting down of the institution of Prophethood and Messengership, as can be seen from the fact that many Prophets and Messengers in the past were sent simply to uphold the revelations received by previous Prophets or to introduce very minor amendments to them.

Thus if God wanted to continue the system of appointing and sending religious guides, there was no need to invent a new institution of Imamate, because the tried and tested, and much more universally recognised institution of Prophethood and Messengership had already proven itself more than capable of upholding, safeguarding, and preserving previously established religions as well as performing any and all other functions that those who invented the concept of Divine Imamate after the Prophet (Saww) had in mind when they came up with it.

Hence, if God had been really interested and keen in continuing to send Revelations and appointing religious guides, He could easily have sent a series of Prophets after Prophet Moḥammad (Saww), with clear instructions that their job was only to uphold, preserve and protect the Dīn of Prophet Moḥammad (Saww), and ensure no changes or deviations creep into it. This would make for a far more successful and effective strategy in as far as convincing the Ummah to accept such a system is concerned, because disbelief in Prophets is not an option for any serious

and sincere Muslim, so by elevating the religious guides after the Prophet (Saww) to the station of Prophethood, God would be essentially making it impossible for anyone in the Ummah to reject their authority, unlike Imamate (as conceived by the Twelver Imāmiyyah) which got rejected by the vast majority of the Ummah due to lack of clear basis in the Qur'ān, and due to the Qur'ān giving absolutely no indication that believers need to believe in any guides other than Messengers and Prophets as an article of faith.

The very conspicuous absence of Imamate in the belief system that the believers are required by God to subscribe and adhere to in the Qur'ān (in verses such as 02: 177, 285; 04: 136) sealed its fate and guaranteed its rejection by the vast, overwhelming majority of believing Muslims in this Ummah throughout history, and to this very day, consigning the belief to an initially miniscule, fringe minority group, i.e. the Imāmiyyah and their heavily Ghuluww-infested and fabrications-ridden Ḥadīth corpus.

REFERENCES:

1. One can refer to Sayyid Alī Abū al-Ḥasan's lecture attempting to bolster the Twelver case from these narrations as an example of ostensibly learned Twelver Imāmī Shī'a contemporary scholars attempting to appropriate this narration for the Twelver cause. His two part discussion can be accessed from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaIuKzNGd8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QyCpeSx-ReA>



2. One version ends at 'Abdullāh bin Mas'ūd but its chain is not reliable.



3. One may refer to his discussion with 'Allamah Aḥmad al-Kātib from here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYb1ktjsOLc>.



4. All this is clearly mentioned in the reports about the emergence of the Wāqifah. See: Al-Ṭūsī, Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifah Muḥammad bin al Ḥasan. *Al-Ghaybah (Kitāb al-Ghaybah)*. Eds. Shaykh 'Ibādallah al-Ṭehrānī & Shaykh 'Alī Aḥmad Nāṣiḥ. Mu'assasat al-Ma'arif al-Islāmīyyah, Qum, 3rd. Ed., 1425 AH., pp. 64-65.

(Narration # 67). Accessible online at: (<https://lib.eshia.ir/15084/1/64> – <https://lib.eshia.ir/15084/1/65>).



5. Ibid., p. 64 (Narration # 66) as well.



6. His testimony has been recorded and preserved in: Al-Ṣadūq, Shaykh Abū Ja'far Muḥammad bin 'Alī bin al-Ḥusain bin Mūsā Ibn Babawayh al Qummī. *Īlal al-Sharā'ī*. al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydarīyah, Najaf, 1385 AH/1966 CE., vol. 1, pp. 235-236. (Narration # 1 from Bāb (Chapter 171)). (<https://lib.eshia.ir/10107/1/236>). He also narrates it in: *Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*. Manshūrāt al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, Qum, 1st. Ed., 1378 H., vol. 1, p. 103. (Narration # 2 from Bāb (Chapter 10)). (<https://lib.eshia.ir/14032/2/103>); in the edition of the same book edited by Sayyid Mahdī al-Ḥusaynī al-Lājūrdī and published by Riḍa Mash'hadī, Qum, 2nd Ed., 1363 H. Sh., see: vol.1, p. 113. (<https://lib.eshia.ir/86808/1/113>).

Also narrated in: Al-Ṭūsī, Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifah Muḥammad bin al Ḥasan. *Al-Ghaybah (Kitāb al-Ghaybah)*. Eds. Shaykh 'Ibādallah al-Ṭehrānī & Shaykh 'Alī Aḥmad Nāṣiḥ. Mu'assasat al-Ma'arif al-Islāmīyyah, Qum, 3rd. Ed., 1425 AH., p. 64. (Narration # 66). (<https://lib.eshia.ir/15084/1/64>).



7. Equally indicative of their utter desperation is how they invented more narrations claiming 12 Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (Saww), and then attributed them through doctored chains to all sorts of non-Twelve historical personalities such as Abū Hurairah and ‘Abdullah bin al-Ḥasan to give a false impression that the Ḥadīth of 12 Imams was Mutawātir and mass transmitted outside Twelver Imāmī circles. One may refer to the book: Al-Khazāz, ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Qummī al-Rāzī. *Kifāyat al-Athar fī al-Naṣṣ ‘alā al-A’imma al-Ithnā ‘Ashar*. Ed. Moḥammad Kāzīm al-Mūsawī & ‘Aqīl al-Rabī. Markaz Nūr al-Anwār fī Ihya’ Bihār al-Anwār, Qum, 1st Ed., 1430 AH. Another edition of this book is available online at: <https://lib.eshia.ir/16054/1/2>

This phenomenon has also been discussed and critically analysed by Professor Hossein Modarressi. See his: *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi‘ite Islam: Abū Ja‘far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmīte Shi‘ite Thought*. Darwin Press, Princeton, NJ, 1993, pp. 103-104, including footnote #262.



8. al-Ṭūsī, Shaykh Abī Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan. *Ikhtiyār Ma‘rifat al-Rijāl* (Known as *Rijāl al-Kashshī*). Ed. Jawād al-Qayūmī al-Iṣfahānī. Mu‘assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī al-Ṭabī‘ah li Jamā‘at al-Mudarrisīn bi Qum al-Musharrafah, Qum, 1st Ed., 1427 AH, p. 383. (Narration #867/8). In the edition available online which is edited by ‘Allāmah Ḥasan al-Muṣṭafawī, and published by Mu‘asseseh Nashr Daneshgah-e Mashhad, Mashhad, 1st Ed., 1409 AH, see vol. 1, p. 458; (Narration # 867):

<https://lib.eshia.ir/10241/1/458>.



9. Professor Hossein Modarressi writes: “A large number, possibly even the majority, recognized Ja‘far as the Imam. The Faḥites, who maintained that the succession need not necessarily pass from father to son and that two brothers could become Imams, did not face a doctrinal problem and followed Ja‘far as Imām after Ḥasan. Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Faḍḍāl, the most prominent jurisconsult in the Imāmīte community of Kūfa, and ‘Alī al-Ṭahīn, a Kūfan *mutakallim* and prominent member of the Faḥite community, were among the Faḥites who followed Ja‘far. It is obviously for this reason that Ja‘far was described by some as “the Imam of the second [generation of the] Faḥites (*imam al-faḥiyya al-thāniya*). Ja‘far’s following was more diverse than this, however. In addition to the Faḥites, it included those who counted him as successor to ‘Alī al-Ḥādī or to his other brother, Muḥammad. Some of these were originally followers of Ḥasan who had lost faith in him when he died with no apparent son. The majority, however, simply considered Ja‘far to be another name on the list of Imams after Ḥasan. For some he was the twelfth Imam, whereas for the Faḥites, who had already added to their list the name of ‘Abd Allāh, son of Ja‘far al- Ṣādiq, he was the thirteenth.” See: *Crisis and Consolidation*, pp. 81-82.



10. Al-Bahbūdī, ‘Allāmah Shaykh Moḥammad Bāqir. *Ma‘rifat al-Ḥadīth wa Tārīkh Nashrihi wa Tadwīnihi wa Thaqāfatihī ‘inda al-Shī‘ah al-Imāmīyyah*. Dār al-Hādī, Beirut, 1st. Ed., 1427 AH/2006 CE., p. 172.



11. For his discussion of how the 12 Caliph Ḥadīth was appropriated by the Twelvers post occultation to bolster their claim about the number of Imams and also the role of Moḥammad bin Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī and ‘Alī bin Bābawayh al-Qummī in being pioneers of this concept of Twelver Imāmah, see: *Crisis and Consolidation*, pp. 99-102.



12. The Nāwūsīyyah were a splinter group and sub-sect who broke away from the main body of the Imāmīyyah after the death of Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in 148 AH. What distinguished them from the rest of the other sub-sects that emerged at the time was their claim that Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (as) was the last and final Imam, as well as the Mahdī, and that he had not died, but gone into occultation, and would appear before the end of time to establish the government of truth and justice. As such, they refused to recognise anyone as his successor.



13. The Shaykh also observes that the choice to argue for occultation served the corrupt powers at the time, for “it was a concept which supported political quietism, and was the superior form of anti-rebellion. One is invited to compare this to the Umayyad promotion of beliefs such as determinism. Thereafter, they are invited to see how these so-called Khawāṣ who the Imāms themselves cursed occupied such close stations that actively benefited the Abbasids.”

