

***Encounters with the Hidden Imam in Early and Pre-Modern Twelver Shī'ī Islam*** by Omid Ghaemmaghami, Leiden/Boston: Brill 2020, 276. €130.00

*Encounters with the Hidden Imam in Early and Pre-Modern Twelver Shī'ī Islam* by Omid Ghaemmaghami is aimed to analyze the accounts addressing the possibility of seeing, recognizing, or coming into contact with the Hidden Imam during the *ghaybah* [occultation]. The central belief of the Imāmī Shī'īs is that the son of Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, the twelfth and final Imam disappeared in 260/874 and has since been shrouded in concealment. This process of *ghaybah* includes the two periods of Minor Occultation (*al-ghaybah al-ṣuġbrā*) and Major Occultation (*al-ghaybah al-kubrā*). Imāmī traditional data reveal it to be possible for the Hidden Imam to be seen, recognized, or encountered during the first occultation period beginning with the death of the eleventh imām, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, and concluding with the death of Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Samurī (d. 329/941), the fourth and the final emissary (*safīr*) of the Hidden Imām. When the early and premodern Imāmī literature is thoroughly examined, the question of contact with the Hidden Imām during the second *ghaybah* yet appears to be puzzling. In this book, Ghaemmaghami emphasizes the absence of narratives in the early Shī'ī authoritative texts that would have evidenced one's communication with the Hidden Imām during the Major Occultation.

The book provides a well-explored and well-documented historiographical analysis on the narratives of the process of understanding, discussing, and demarcating the issue of contact with the Hidden Imām during the Major Occultation. It consists of four chapters, except an introduction, a conclusion, and Appendices 1-2

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presenting in-depth research of sources in Arabic and Western languages. In the introduction, Ghaemmaghami provides a thorough critique of Western research on the subject of *ghaybab* and the interaction with the Hidden Imām while highlighting the lack of interest in the topic. Ignác Goldziher is introduced to be the first Western scholar to address the problem of contact (p. 8). The writings of scholars including Jawad Ali, Hassan Ansari, Edward Sell, Moojan Momen, Ayatollah Ja'far Subhānī, Sayed Ammar Nakshawani, and Abdulaziz Sachedina have been referenced since they briefly mention the accounts of encounters with the Hidden Imām. A number of stories related to the topic of the encounters with the Hidden Imām, said Ghaemmaghami, have taken place in the works of Etan Kohlberg, A. Amanat, A. Arjomand, R. Brunner, M. MacEoin, W. Madelung and D. Stewart. In addition, Henry Corbin and Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi were the first scholars to devote an entire chapter to the aforementioned subject. Hence, a thorough analysis and critique of the works of the two scholars is widely covered in the introduction of the book.

The first chapter, “The Unknown, the Unseen, and the Unrecognized”, is dedicated to dissecting the Imāmī Shī'ī hadith collections and the Qur'an commentaries (*tafsīr*) compiled by the time of the Minor Occultation. To Ghaemmaghami's broad analysis of the written Imāmī hadiths and *tafsīr* materials from the period of the Minor Occultation, the *ghaybab* of the Twelfth Imām is rarely referenced. The reports narrated in *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, a well-accepted hadith compilation of the Imāmīs, of al-Kulaynī (d. 328–9/940–1) although not only mention of two distinct *ghaybabs* of the Qā'im, but also provide stories of those who stated to had seen the Hidden Imām during the Minor Occultation (p. 40-44). Here, particular attention is given to the contradicting hadith materials from the time of the Minor Occultations formed in the same book. Despite the amount of data claiming the impossibility of seeing or recognizing the Qā'im during the Minor Occultation and particularly during the Major Occultation, a limited number of hadiths say otherwise.

Chapter Two is devoted to unpacking three particular hadiths suggesting the possibility of seeing, recognizing, or encountering the Hidden Imām only by some. Two of those three hadiths are from al-

Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*, and one is cited in *Kitāb al-Ghaybah* of al-Nu'mānī (d. 345/956 or 360/971). The first and second analyzed hadiths suggest the possibility of interaction with the Imām narrated in *al-Kāfī* also included in *al-Ghaybah*, and then almost a century later, the first appeared in *Taqrīb al-ma'ārif* of Abū l-Ṣalāḥ al-Ḥalabī (d. 447/1055) and *Kitāb al-Ghaybah* of al-Ṭūsī (d. 459 or 460/1066–7). The second hadith was narrated by al-Ḥalabī (d. 447/1055) and al-Majlisī. The third hadith appeared for the first time in al-Nu'mānī's *al-Ghaybah* and then was narrated by al-Ṭūsī. The three hadiths here are criticized for being of the Wāqifī origin because either someone in the *isnād* chain identified as a Wāqifī or a particular person of the *isnād* is known to have transmitted hadiths from the Wāqifīs. Relatedly, Madelung is referred to as the first scholar to have pointed out the Wāqifī origin of the hadiths mentioning two *ghaybahs* for the Qā'im.

While the final *tawqī'* (written communication) of the Hidden Imām transmitted to the last emissary who died in 329/941 has a central role in proving the main objection of the book and therefore has been referred to across the study, it is thoroughly analyzed under the title of "A Lying Impostor" in Chapter Three. The final *tawqī'* was first recorded in *Kamāl al-dīn* of al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (b. ca. 311/923; d. 381/991–2): "... [Before I reappear], some [or someone] will come to my followers claiming to have seen [me] with their own eyes. But beware! Anyone who claims to have seen [me] before the appearance of al-Sufyānī and [the sounding of] the Cry is a lying impostor..." (p. 99). The *tawqī'* has been narrated in the following Imāmī tradition, however, the "lying impostor" part, Ghaemmaghami argues, was either being excluded or being interpreted in favor of leaving a possibility of contact with the Hidden Imām. The statements of the Imāmī scholars of the fourth century, including al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍá and al-Ṭūsī, that making contact with the Hidden Imām is possible, argued Ghaemmaghami, contradict the earliest general traditionalist Imāmī acceptance. This particular chapter of the book is important to reveal how confusing the accounts of that era are in terms of the possibility of contact with the Hidden Imām. They acknowledge the judgment of al-Murtaḍá, claiming that: "We cannot be certain that [the Imām] is hidden from all of his initiates/friends" (p. 129), even as they narrate accounts preventing any kind of contact with the Imām.

With the title of “From the Youth and the Stone to the Proliferation of Accounts”, Chapter Four discusses early accounts of encounters [the first of which was inscribed by the sixth century] with the Imām in a wakeful state. It thus suggests that nearly two centuries after the start of the Major Occultation, the records enabling communication with the Hidden Imām have multiplied quickly. The book brings out the narrative that contact with the Hidden Imām had gained popularity by the seventh century, particularly with the writings of Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266) and Abū l-Fatḥ al-Irbilī (d. 692/1292-3 or 693/1293-4). The emic process of the rapid increase in the accounts enabling the interaction with the Hidden Imām is being introduced as “an invention of a tradition”.

In the book under review, each hadith and narration related to the *ghaybah* and the possibility of seeing the Hidden Imām are meticulously examined. However, a critical analysis of the final *tawqīʿ*, despite appearing at the center of the discussion of the matter of contact with the Hidden Imām, is not thoroughly given. Rigorous attention is given to the mysterious status of ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Samurī. It is stressed that there is no mention of his presence in the Imāmī texts from the time of the Minor Occultation. Not even his name is stated in those books. The final *tawqīʿ*, on the other hand, has been treated as if it is an authentic statement. The matter of why the final *tawqīʿ* was not mentioned in the texts written immediately following the start of the Major Occultation has not been questioned. However, the narration of it roughly thirty to forty years after the Minor Occultation is being given as a positive sign though. “...quoted in a work only three decades removed from the start of the Greater Occultation” (p. 4).

Another point to which is needed to draw attention is the usage of the phrase of “invention of a tradition” (145) in reference to the quick dissemination of the stories that enabled contact with the Hidden Imām. Chapter Four begins with the clause “The tacit approval of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍá and al-Ṭūsī of the possibility of seeing the Imām foreshadowed the ‘invention’ of a tradition.” The early and premodern Imāmī studies examined in the book all seem to include accounts that certainly refute contact with the Hidden Imām, yet some accounts do allow it. For example, al-Şadūq, however, is the first scholar to narrate

the *tawqīf* [claimed to have heard it from his teacher Aḥmad al-Mukattib] and mentions a dream in which he was instructed by the Hidden Imām to pen a book. Al-Ṭūsī, despite citing the final *tawqīf*, narrated quite a few accounts allowing contact with the Hidden Imām. Al-Nu‘mānī is one of the earliest Imāmī traditionalists who supported the argument that the only difference between the Minor Occultation and Major Occultation is that contact with the Imām is not possible in the latter phase. On the other hand, he is the first scholar who narrated the three hadiths [two of which were narrated by al-Kulaynī before Nu‘mānī], according to which, the Imām could be able to encounter his *mawālī*. While arguing for the impossibility of contact with the Hidden Imām, Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) was open to the idea that the Imām could be seen by his close *mawlá*. Al-Kulaynī likewise narrated the first two hadiths [discussed in depth in Chapter Two], which have been used to support the idea of the possibility of contact with the Hidden Imām during the Major Occultation. Because there have been accounts allowing contact with the Imām in almost every period from the early time of the Major Occultation, I am not sure whether the matter of increasing the number of stories of the contact could be introduced as an “invention of a tradition”.

*Encounters with the Hidden Imam in Early and Pre-Modern Twelver Shī‘ī Islam* is a well-researched and well-analyzed historiographical text written for academics and students of Religious Studies interested in Islam and particularly Shiism. The book is rewarding in providing a broad analysis of the prominent Imāmī literature in terms of revealing the historical process of the belief in contact with the Hidden Imām during the Minor Occultation and Major Occultation. It is an important study that fills a significant gap.

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