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Ithnā ‘ashar zā’id wāḥidiyya: Hadith Attesting a Forgotten “Twelve Plus One” Imāmī Faction

The century following the death of the eleventh Imām of the Imāmī Shi‘a, al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (d. 260/874) was accompanied by a host of religio-political and scholarly developments that came to define the community known as the Twelver Shi‘a. This was the period in which the belief that al-‘Askarī left behind a young son as the twelfth and final Imām prevailed over a myriad of other competing claims; the era in which the institution of the Imām’s Deputies (*sufarā’*) was both established and folded, and the time when the Twelver belief in a fixed series of Twelve Imāms after the Prophet became a defining creedal belief. Modern scholarship has thus far succeeded in problematizing and delineating these developments. This paper brings to light a lesser-known development during this period, which has thus far escaped the attention of modern scholarship. Various Twelver hadith works compiled in the first century of the Twelfth Imām’s occultation (*ghayba*) feature reports in which the Prophet or one of the Shi‘i Imāms declares that there will be exactly “twelve” Imāms who come after the Prophet; some of these narrations even foretell the names of the twelve Imāms. However, a close reading of the *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt* of al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902-903), *al-Kāfi* of al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) and the extant form of *Kitāb Sulaym* ibn Qays reveals the presence of several reports asserting that the total number of Imāms after the Prophet Muḥammad is thirteen, not twelve. These unusual hadiths offer the following framework for enumerating the Imāms: there are twelve Imāms, all of whom are the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad and Imām ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. ‘Alī himself is reckoned separately from the twelve Imāms of his progeny because he is the father of the twelve. Thus, the total number of Imāms including ‘Alī is thirteen, or more precisely, “twelve plus one”. Prior scholars have documented the presence of one such narration in *Kitāb Sulaym* and another in *al-Kāfi* and treated both as outliers. However, the total number of “twelve plus one Imāms” reports in *Baṣā’ir*, *al-Kāfi*, *Kitāb Sulaym*, and *Kifāyat al-Athār* of al-Khazzāz amounts to nine hadiths comprising eight distinct texts (*mutūn*). This is not an insignificant number and precludes the idea that scribal errors are responsible for these texts. The antiquity of these “thirteen Imāms” hadiths is further demonstrated by tracking the transmission of these reports in later hadith compilations dating from al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991) to the era of al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1699). Our investigation shows that some of these “twelve plus one Imāms” reports reappeared in later Twelver works without alteration while others underwent significant redaction and alteration (addition and deletion of words) to conform to the belief in exactly twelve Imāms. Our conclusion is that the existence of several “twelve plus one Imāms” reports in the earliest extant Twelver hadith works attests to the existence of an alternative Imāmology schema during the formative period of Twelver Shi‘ism.



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