

The Way of Nobility Knowledge of the Imam

Minhāj al-karāma fī maʿrifat al-Imāma

by

AL-ḤASAN IBN YŪSUF IBN AL-MUṬAHHAR AL-ḤILLĪ
(d. 726/1325)

also known as

AL-ʿALLĀMA AL-ḤILLĪ

*A parallel English-Arabic text translated,
introduced and annotated by*

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EPIGRAPH

وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُبِينٍ (سورة يس ١٢/٣٦)

And We have enumerated all things in a manifest *imām*.

Qur'ān 36:12



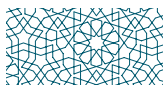
قَالَ أَسَدُ اللَّهِ الْغَالِبُ الْإِمَامُ عَلِيُّ بْنُ أَبِي طَالِبٍ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ:
لَا يُقَاسُ بِآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِنْ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ أَحَدٌ، وَلَا يُسَوَّى بِهِمْ مَنْ جَرَتْ
عَلَيْهِمْ نِعْمَتُهُمْ، هُمْ أَسَاسُ الدِّينِ وَعِمَادُ الْيَقِينِ؛

نهج البلاغة (خطبة ٢، ص ٤٢)

The Ever-Victorious Lion of Allah, the Imam ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib عليه السلام said:

No one from this Umma may be compared with the Household of Muḥammad ﷺ
nor can anyone who is a beneficiary of their blessings ever be held equal to them
for they are the very foundation of religion as such and the very pillars of direct
spiritual vision.

Nahj al-Balāgha (The Peak of Eloquence, Khuṭba 2, p. 42)

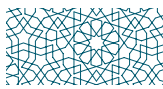


PREFACE

Among the most celebrated works in defence of the Shīʿī belief in the *imāma* is that which was authored by the extraordinary polymath Jamāl al-Dīn Abū Maṣṣūr al-Ḥasan b. Sadīd al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Zayn al-Dīn b. al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, known to posterity by the honorific title of *al-ʿAllāma*, ‘the extraordinarily erudite.’ He was born on a Friday evening, 29 Ramaḍān 648/1250 to a family of scholars in the Iraqī town of al-Ḥilla. His father Sadīd al-Dīn was a man of prodigious learning as was his maternal uncle Najm al-Dīn, known as al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī. ʿAllāma received a distinguished education from his father and uncle as well as their contemporaries, which included some of the most distinguished figures in Shīʿī intellectual history, such as the two Sayyid brothers Jamāl al-Dīn b. Ṭāwūs and Raḍī al-Dīn b. Ṭāwūs, Kamāl al-Dīn Mītham al-Baḥrānī (author of a famous commentary on the *Nahj al-Balāgha*), and last but not least Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī who is easily one of the most widely-learned and accomplished scholars in the history of Islam. ʿAllāma authored hundreds of works in the areas of law, theology, logic, philosophy, and *ḥadīth* sciences. He died in his hometown of Ḥilla on a Saturday, the 21st of Muḥarram, 726/1325.

His most influential work in defence of the *imāmā* is his *Minhāj al-karāma fī maʿrifat al-imāmā* (*The Way of Nobility: On Knowledge of the Imam*). It is a concise summary of key arguments in favour of the Imamate of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and his descendants, peace be upon them. He also presents a summary of arguments for the fundamental doctrines that are logically prior to this, namely *tawḥīd* (Divine unity) and *nubuwwa* (prophethood) and related teachings, especially *iṣma* (the protection from error which characterises prophets and Imams). He also marshals detailed evidence from Sunnī historical and *ḥadīth* sources to establish the lack of qualifications for leadership of the Muslim community by those persons whom the majority of Muslims followed, that is to say, the first three so-called ‘rightly guided caliphs’ (*al-khulafāʾ al-rāshidūn*).

There is a fascinating story behind how this work came to be written. Apparently, the Mongol ruler Öljeitü (also known as Muḥammad Khudābanda) after having first been a Buddhist, then a Christian, and then a Sunnī Muslim remained spiritually unsatisfied. When he learned of another ‘version’ of Islam he summoned ʿAllāma, who then proceeded to answer all of his questions as well as those of the Sunnī scholars of his court resulting in Öljeitü adopting the Shīʿa faith. Öljeitü subsequently ordered that the names



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of the Twelve Imams be mentioned in the sermon (*khutba*) of the Friday prayer in all the mosques in his sultanate and also erected a beautiful prayer-niche (*mihrāb*) bearing the names of all Twelve Imams in ornate stucco in the Grand Mosque of Isfahan, which survives to this day. ‘Allāma compiled these arguments in the *Minhāj al-karāma* for Öljeitü. Subsequently, ‘Allāma was also inducted into the retinue of the Mongol ruler and travelled with him wherever he went instructing him and members of the court in a kind of ‘mobile-academy’ known as *al-madrasat al-sayyāra*.

The *Minhāj al-karāma* came to be very widely known. In fact, it caused such a stir in Sunnī circles that ‘Allāma’s contemporary the Mamluk era scholar Ibn Taymiyya authored a ‘refutation’ entitled *Minhāj al-sunnat al-nabawiyya* which continues to be popular among Wahabi and Salafi scholars today. In the *Minhāj al-karāma*, ‘Allāma goes beyond the work of earlier scholars in arguing for the *imāma*, including the works of his teachers Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn b. Ṭāwūs, Sayyid Raḍī al-Dīn b. Ṭāwūs, and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī. He also streamlines many of the arguments in other works of which the most important is probably *al-Shāfi fī l-imāma* by al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044).

Until now this seminal text remained unavailable to the English-speaking world. It is a convenient handbook that presents the case for the *imāma* without being long-winded or overly concise. It can be read by anyone: a Shī‘ī believer, a Sunnī Muslim wanting to learn the Shī‘ī ‘side of the story,’ or even a non-Muslim who is curious about the religion. It is with such an audience in mind that this translation is being presented to the public.

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