Mahdis and Millenarians

Mahdis and Millenarians is a discussion of Shīʿite groups in eighth- and ninth-century Iraq and Iran, whose ideas reflected a mixture of indigenous non-Muslim religious teachings and practices in Iraq in the early centuries of Islamic rule. These ideas demonstrate the fluidity of religious boundaries of this period. Particular attention is given to the millenarian expectations and the revolutionary political activities of these sects. Specifically, the author's intention is to define the term "millenarian," to explain how these groups reflect that definition, and to show how they consequently need to be seen in a much larger context than Shīʿite or even simply Muslim history. The author concentrates, therefore, on the historical-sociological role of these movements. The central thesis of the study is that they were the first revolutionary chiliastic groups in Islamic history and, combined with the later influence of some of their doctrines, contributed to the tactics and teachings of a number of subsequent Shīʿite or quasi-Shīʿite sectarian groups.

William F. Tucker is Associate Professor of History at the University of Arkansas and holds an A.B. degree in European history from the University of North Carolina, an M.A. in Balkan and Middle East history, and a Ph.D. in Middle Eastern history, the last two from Indiana University. He has authored multiple articles and book chapters on Shīʿism, Kurds, Mamluk history, and the history of natural disasters in the Middle East between 600 and 1800.

Mahdis and Millenarians

Shī`ite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq

WILLIAM F. TUCKER
University of Arkansas

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521883849

First published 2008

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data
Tucker, William Frederick, 1941–
Mahdis and millenarians : Shi`ite extremists in early Muslim Iraq / William F. Tucker.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-88384-9 (hardback)
1. Shi`ah – Iraq – History. 2. Shi`ah – Iran – History. 3. Islam – Iraq – History. 4. Islam – Iran – History. 5. Islamic fundamentalism – Iraq – History. 6. Islamic fundamentalism – Iran – History. I. Title.
BP192.7.I7T83 2008
297.8´20956709021 – dc22 2007020994

ISBN 978-0-521-88384-9 Hardback

Contents

Acknowledgments

The present book has taken many years to formulate and produce, primarily because I became convinced years ago that Middle Eastern and Islamic history should be embedded within the larger context of world history and, in particular, comparative historical and sociological analysis of religion. In determining the requisite knowledge and methodology to use in this study, I have incurred many intellectual and personal debts, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank a series of individuals and institutions who had major roles in my scholarly, educational, and personal life.

First of all, I want to thank my good friend and colleague Evan B. Bukey for all of his emotional and professional support for decades here at the University of Arkansas. Without his encouragement, advice, and occasional scolding, this book would not be appearing now or, perhaps, ever. Similarly, I have no doubt that without years of friendly support and intellectual input from Michael Morony, valued friend and distinguished scholar at UCLA, and Fred McGraw Donner, equally valued friend, premier scholar, and supportive colleague at the University of Chicago, I would not have been able to produce this study, or, for that matter, many of the articles I have published over the years. The same holds true for my cherished friend of many years, Robert W. Olson, distinguished scholar at the University of Kentucky.

Professor Olson has been a major source of intellectual and emotional sustenance since our days as graduate students in Bloomington, Indiana. His advice and insights, especially on the history of the Kurdish people (an area of mutual interest), have been invaluable in my understanding and teaching of Middle Eastern history. Paul Walker at the University of Chicago, the preeminent scholar of Isma'īlism, tendered valuable counsel and shared materials with me, for which I am most grateful. In addition, I would like to remember with great fondness two immensely learned friends who helped my work in numerous ways: the late G. Martin Hinds and Michael W. Dols.

Going back many years, I owe a tremendous debt to a number of teachers and scholars for their instruction and guidance in the discipline of history. I will always be indebted to Herbert L. Bodman and Josef Anderle for starting me on the path of historical studies so many years ago in idyllic Chapel Hill. Similarly, I can never repay the intellectual guidance and support of the two people who most shaped my ideas about historical analysis and the study of world cultures: the late Wadie Jwaideh and my first graduate mentor, Charles Jelavich. Professor Jwaideh made me really aware of the riches of Middle Eastern and Islamic cultures and societies and, among other issues, afforded me valuable insights into the history of Iraq (his natal country), Shi`ism, and the Kurdish people. In addition, he offered great personal and psychological support to his other students, and to me. Similarly, Charles Jelavich was a guide and inspiration in my educational and professional maturation. Professor Jelavich led me through the intricacies of Balkan civilization and cultures and, in so doing, enabled me to see the historian's craft and methodology at their best.

I would also be remiss if I did not acknowledge the scholarly guidance and influence of a series of specialists who taught me medieval East European and Byzantine histories: Glanville Downey, George Soulis, Gustav Bayerle, Barisha Krekic (for many years now at UCLA), and Donald Nicol (University of

Edinburgh). I benefited immeasurably from their instruction, which helped me to place the Middle East within a larger and comparative context.

My appreciation also goes to a number of colleagues, former colleagues, and friends here at Arkansas, beginning with Joel Gordon, a premier historian, who has been encouraging and collegial in his time here in Fayetteville. I also wish to thank Linda Schilcher and Gwenn Ohkruhlik for their support and friendship. Thanks, similarly, to my colleagues Thomas Kennedy, Daniel Sutherland, Donald Engels, Walter L. Brown, David Sloan, and Henry Tsai for their friendly interest over the years. I hope that this book will stand as a tribute to the memories of Robert Reeser, Gordon McNeil, George Ray, Timothy Donovan, and Stephen Strausberg. Nor could I omit mention of my friends John Ryan (my mathematician friend, who tolerates my math ignorance), Patrick Conge, Bob Stassen (fun to argue politics with), Tatsuya Fukushima, Myron Brody, Gerald Sloan (esteemed musician friend), Conrad and Ann Waligorski, Joseph and Anne Marie Candido, James S. Chase, Rick Sonn and Mary Neligh, and Anne and James Vizzier. Special mention should also be made of my friend and former colleague Jim Jones, distinguished scholar of American history, and Larry Malley, Director of the University of Arkansas Press and fellow lover of the Tarheels and Chapel Hill. My appreciation goes to Suzanne Wall and Jane Rone, who, along with a number of other office personnel over the years, have made my life at Arkansas infinitely easier and more pleasant. The able assistance of Roger Henry helped me immensely when I prepared my manuscript in final form.

It goes without saying that a considerable number of libraries and librarians have made this book possible. I would therefore like to thank the staffs of the following libraries: Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Bodleian Library of Oxford University, the India Office Library in London, the Istanbul University Library, the Nuri Osmaniye Mosque Library in Istanbul, the Suleymaniye

Central Library in Istanbul, and the University Research Library of Cambridge University. In the United States, I owe a great deal to the libraries of the following institutions: Columbia University, Cornell University, Duke University, Harvard University, Indiana University, the University of Arkansas, the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, among others. In Canada, particular thanks and best wishes go to Steve Millier and the fine staff of the Islamic Institute Library, McGill University, in Montreal, who have made my research trips there both productive and enjoyable.

Of course, I am perhaps most indebted to the reference, acquisitions, and interlibrary loan departments of my own library, Mullins Library, University of Arkansas. Specifically, my heartfelt gratitude goes to the following people: Anne Marie Candido, Steve Chism, Doris Cleek, Judy Culberson, Donna Daniels, Phillip Jones, Beth Juhl, Elizabeth McKee, Debbie Miller, Necia Parker-Gibson, Karen Myers, Robin Roggio, and Michele Tabler. Any mention of Mullins Library, of course, must include a tribute to the man who did so much to make it into a serious research facility: the late John Harrison. John was a learned man, a fellow book and music lover. Along with many others, I owe him a great deal and miss him profoundly.

I have enjoyed substantial assistance and support for years from a number of graduate students and research assistants. Special thanks go to the following people: Karim al-Ghamedi, Rakan al-Mutairi, Charles Argo, Michael Bracy, the late Bill Dederich, Teresa Farah, Dorianne Gould, Lahmuddin, Gabriel Lahoud, Matt Parnell, Valor Pickett, Patricia Singleton, Monica Taylor, Stephanie Wade, Christopher Wright, and most particularly Ahmet Akturk and Farid al-Salim, both of whom have done much hard work for me. Ali Sadeghi, manager of the University of Arkansas Bookstore, has been of great help in deciphering some difficult Persian texts, and I want to thank him for his generous assistance.

Portions of this book have been published previously in different forms. I would like, therefore, to thank the editors and staffs of the following journals for permission to reprint, with modifications, the following studies: "Bayān ibn Sam`ān and the Bayāniyya: Shī`ite Extremists of Umayyad Iraq," *Muslim World*, LXV (1975); "Rebels and Gnostics: al-Mugīra ibn Sa`īd and the Mugīriyya," *Arabica*, XXII (1975); "Abu Mansūr al-`Ijli and the Mansūriyya: A Study in Medieval Terrorism," *Islam*, 54 (1977); and "`Abd Allāh ibn Mu`āwiya and the Janāhiyya: Rebels and Ideologues of the Late Umayyad Period," *Studia Islamica*, LI (1980).

I, of course, owe much gratitude and affection to my family and family friends. My late grandparents, Neil and Pearl F. Thompson; my late uncle Gilbert Cour, a proud son of Swansea, Wales, and surrogate father; and my aunt Annie Reid Cour, all of whom quite simply made my life possible and immeasurably better. Thanks to Mildred Walker, my relative and benefactor, as well as to her son Larry, with whom I grew up. Special mention, also, goes to Sara Cartrette and Dr. Bill Avant, both of whom have been friends and supporters for many years, as well as Linda Rethmeyer, Penny and Fred Carson, Susan Staffa, and the late Etta Perkins, all friends from Bloomington days. I would also like to express deepest affection for a family friend, indeed, a member of our extended family, Nongphot Sternstein, a great lady and my son's "virtual" mother and Thai language teacher at the University of Pennsylvania. Deepest affection and thanks, also, go to my sisters, Cecilia Burtnett (a fellow historian) and Cynthia Phillips, as well as to my nieces and nephew and their families.

Finally, my love and gratitude go to my greatest supporters and inspiration, my wife, Janet G. Tucker, world-class scholar of Russian literature and best friend of forty years; my marvelous son Robert E. Tucker, anthropologist and scholar of Southeast (especially Thailand) and South Asian societies; and my beautiful and beloved daughter-in-law Charoensri Supattarasakda.

To Lewis Bateman and Eric Crahan, my editors at Cambridge University Press, Kate Queram, as well as all of the other Cambridge staff and support personnel, many thanks for your assistance and your patience in this process. Sincere thanks also to the anonymous readers who recommended this book for publication.

Preface

With the advent of the Iranian Revolution in 1978, the Western world became aware to a much greater extent than before of the significance and the emotional and intellectual power of Shīʿite Islam. Serious students and observers of world affairs at that time began to cast about for Western-language studies of Shīʿite history, only to find that there was much less scholarly work available than might have been anticipated. Aside from the studies of Hamid Algar, Alessandro Bausani, Henri Corbin, Michel Mazzaoui, and, somewhat later, Shahrough Akhavi, Michael Fischer, Said Arjomand, and Abdulaziz Sachedina, one could find few substantial examinations of "Twelver" (*Imāmī* or "moderate") Shīʿism in Iran for the past four centuries.[1] This was true

[1] Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley, Calif., and Los Angeles, 1969); Alessandro Bausani, *Persia Religiosa* (Milan, 1959); Henri Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, Vols. I–IV (Paris, 1971–1972); Michel Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safawids: Shīʿism, Sūfism, and the Ghulāt* (Wiesbaden, 1972). Later important works include the following: Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany, N.Y., 1980); Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980). On Safavid and Qajar Shīʿism, see Said Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shīʿite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago, 1984). For an important study of the "Twelver" *Mahdī* concept, we

in spite of the fact that it has been the state religion of Iran since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Since the Iranian Revolution, not surprisingly, a number of important works have appeared, for example, those of Yann Richard, Heinz Halm, Moojan Momen, and Hossein Modarressi, just to mention a few, which have given us a much better understanding of Shīʿism in Iran and, in some cases, elsewhere.[2] Now, happily, one may also point to a number of studies of non-Twelver Shīʿism (e.g., Ismāʿīlism), for example, the works of Farhad Daftary, Paul Walker, Abbas Hamdani, Wilferd Madelung, Heinz Halm, and Ismail Poonawala.[3]

have Abdulaziz Sachedina's *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the* Mahdī *in Twelver Shīʿism* (Albany, N.Y., 1981).

[2] Yann Richard, *Shīʿite Islam: Polity, Ideology, and Creed*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford, 1995); Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, trans. Janet Watson (Edinburgh, 1991); Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shīʿi Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shiʿism* (New Haven and London, 1985); Hossein Modarressi Tabataba'i, *An Introduction to Shīʿi Law* (London, 1984). One may multiply the number of such works, especially those of Nikki Keddie (for example, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* [New York, 1995]) but, in the interest of space and time, other writings on various aspects of Twelver Shīʿism will be included in the bibliography, where one will also find more recent studies of Shīʿism outside Iran, especially in Iraq and Lebanon.

[3] Two works by Farhad Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), and his edited book *Medieval Ismāʿīlī History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996); Paul E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiʿism: The Ismāʿīlī Neoplatonism of Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī* (Cambridge, 1993) and *Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī: Intellectual Missionary* (London and New York, 1996); Abbas Hamdani, "Evolution of the Organisational Structure of the Fatimi Daʿwah," *Arabian Studies*, 3 (1976), 85–114 and numerous other articles by the same author; Heinz Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der Frühen Ismaʿīlie: Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis* (Wiesbaden, 1978); Ismail K. Poonawala, numerous articles, including, most recently, "Ismāʿīlī *taʾwīl* of the Qurʾān," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, ed. A. Rippin (Oxford, 1988), 199–222. One may also find a reference to his excellent bio-bibliography of Isma'ili literature in the bibliography of this work. The Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs, of course, were examined many years ago in two classic studies, that of Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Order of the Assassins* (The Hague, 1955), and Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (New York, 1968).

From a casual reading of the aforementioned scholars, it is clear that the history of Shīʿite Islam is a very long, controversial, and complicated one, and it is certainly not the purpose of this work to present an exhaustive history of Shīʿism. In spite of all of the emphasis upon Iranian Shīʿism, it is crucial to understand that Shīʿite history has its roots in the wider history of the early Muslim community and that it is not specific to one ethnic or linguistic group. The pluralistic nature of early Shīʿism constitutes the starting point for the present study, devoted to an examination of certain "extremist" Shīʿite organizations that originated in early Muslim Iraq (i.e., seventh–eighth century A.D.) and that had an impact upon later religious groups, whether Shīʿite, non-Shīʿite, or even quasi-Shīʿite. Whereas a long exposition of the broad patterns of Shīʿite history is beyond the scope of the present study, certainly that history can be better understood through elucidating the evolution of four early extremist Shīʿite groups whose ideas and tactics had a substantial impact upon later Shīʿites ("moderate" and "extremist"[4]), non-Shīʿite groupings, and quasi-Shīʿite religious movements. Such an investigation is necessary for an understanding of the origins and development of Shīʿism and other facets of the Islamic faith.

The groups to be examined in this book include the followers of Bayān ibn Samʿān, al-Mughīra ibn Saʿīd, Abū Mansūr al-ʿIjli, and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muʿāwiya. These sectarian leaders all led uprisings against the Umayyad Caliphs (who ruled from 661 to 750 A.D.) during the first half of the eighth century. In addition to their seditious activities aimed at the ruling elite, these individuals and those who followed them developed religious doctrines and tactics destined to have a lasting influence upon groups all the way to the present. Their doctrines were to affect moderate Shīʿites, extremist Shīʿites (the Nusayris or ʿAlawis of present-day Syria), quasi-Shīʿite sects such as the Druze and the

4 The issue of "extremism" or *Ghulāt* among the Shīʿites is examined in note 11.

Ahl-i Haqq (Kurdish sectarians), and even non-Shīʿites, for example, the Sunni-affiliated Sufis. The organization and techniques employed by at least two of the four groups were later used with telling effect against their religious-political opponents.

Important factors to be emphasized include the understanding of these groups as belonging to a milieu of religious dissent and also, especially, to a fluidly conceived community in the process of defining its parameters and its governing paradigm. In other words, it is vital to understand that our received notions of Islamic thought and institutions were in the process of formation at the time these groups were active. They may be seen as religious dissenters whose vision of reality was violently suppressed and unacceptable to the larger community, but it is particularly important that their ideas were not eradicated and, in fact, came to play an important role in some of the groups mentioned above and to be referred to again by those who incorporated these concepts into an evolving, dissenting body of belief. One must also be cognizant of the fact that, as always, these groups were not solely "religious." As is always the case, religious groups or sects, however one chooses to label them, exist in the world, that is, they relate in some way or other to social, political, or even economic realities surrounding them. As we shall see, this was most certainly the case with the movements to be examined here.

In the present study, the ideas and activities of the Bayāniyya (followers of Bayān), the Mughīriyya (the followers of al-Mughīra), the Mansūriyya (Abū Mansūr's partisans), and the Janāhiyya (the sect forming around Ibn Muʿāwiya) will be analyzed in terms of origins, evolution, and the nature of their impact upon later Islamic sects or groups. In particular, an attempt will be made to delineate the original contributions of each of the four groups. The present volume, it should be emphasized, must not be construed as an exercise in comparative religion or the history of religion. The approach adopted here, quite frankly, is to treat religious ideas as a form of ideology that shapes the

behavior of its adherents. Furthermore, it should be noted that the organizational structure of this monograph is conceived in a manner calculated to actually present the subject matter as well as the results of the research, particularly because there is disagreement and a lack of clarity about just who believed what, and how those beliefs originated and were transmitted.

Ultimately, the most significant goal here is to show that these four sects were the first millenarian movements (groups expecting total, imminent, and collective salvation *in this world*) to appear in the Muslim world. In a sense, the inspiration for this project lies not in any of the synthetic or monographic studies of Shīʿism, however excellent and provocative, but rather in a book that the present author read many years ago as a young man. When I first encountered Norman Cohn's brilliant *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, I felt that it was one of the most penetrating analyses of religious dissent that I had ever encountered and, quite frankly, one of the most interesting books of history in any field with which I was familiar. It was controversial; the author made dangerous and tenuous connections between Reformation religious groups and modern political movements; but for all of its radical interpretations, it seemed to penetrate to the heart of what religious dissent, involving violence and/or revolutionary politics, was about. The importance of its insights and methodology came to be readily seen in the series of conferences, volumes of collected essays, and journals devoted to comparative millenarism that it stimulated (references to these can be found in the bibliography). It has continued to generate books and articles about millenarism.

When I began to examine the various volumes and essays devoted to this subject, I was struck by the absence of any serious and systematic studies from Islamic history. This situation has not changed over the decades since I first began working with this subject. To be sure, one sees the term "millenarian"

employed in various studies, but, with the exception of Said A. Arjomand, scholars of Islam seem to feel no need to explain exactly what this term involves. At the very least, a millenarian movement is a group or sect expecting total, imminent, and collective salvation in this world. This may or may not involve the intervention of some messianic figure. One may speak of a millenarian paradigm, but the varied nature of the phenomenon has to be kept in mind. The groups to be examined here possess many of the characteristics that are seemingly a part of this type of sociopolitical religious movement, regardless of time or location. Such characteristics as militant elitism, reversal of status, antinomianism (not simply vulgar libertinism), and, frequently, a sense of relative deprivation or *perceived* injustice are often associated with millenarian movements and are demonstrably present within the groups constituting the subject of this study. In this sense, hopefully, one will gain some understanding of the millenarian impulse in early Shīʿite and Muslim history generally. It is also to be hoped that this analysis will show the similarity of the sects under examination to other groups in other religious traditions, at other times and places, that is to say, that this research will be of potential value for comparative studies, whether by anthropologists, sociologists, or historians of comparative religion. It must be reiterated, however, that this book is not, *per se*, a study in comparative religion. Furthermore, in the interest of clarity and coherence, I propose to reserve the millenarian analysis for a separate chapter. One might argue that it would be preferable to treat the topic group by group in each of the relevant chapters, but it seems to me that technical problems with sources and analysis of the groups' ideas would obscure their millenarian features, in addition to which these features are best understood by analyzing them within the context of the groups taken together, instead of in isolation. One of the most obvious reasons for this is that the four groups under consideration evolved over a period

of years in which survivors of one suppressed group went on to join and to take their ideas with them into another.

The book consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 is devoted to an examination of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Saba' and his followers, as well as to the rebellion of al-Mukhtār and the Kaisāniyya. Special emphasis is placed upon the impact of Ibn Saba' and al-Mukhtār upon the four sects constituting the primary focus of this study. Chapters 2 through 5 deal with Bayān, al-Mughīra, Abū Mansūr, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muʿāwiya, and their respective followers. Chapter 6 focuses upon the millenarian features of the four groups, considers the impact of the four groups on later movements, and also points to parallels with non-Islamic millenarians outside the Middle East. A short conclusion offers final thoughts about the nature of the four sects examined in the body of the text.

In the first five chapters the organization is essentially the same. Each chapter consists of four basic divisions. The first part contains information about the leader of the particular group. Next, the membership of each sect is examined. This is followed in each instance by an enumeration and discussion of the religious ideas. In the final paragraphs of the individual chapters, an attempt is made to assess the contributions and the significance of each sect.

There is little in the way of secondary literature devoted specifically to these groups, the best study undoubtedly being that by Heinz Halm, entitled *Die Islamische Gnosis: Die Extreme Schīʿa und die ʿAlawiten.*[5] Halm's study traces the nature of gnostic thought from the early extremist Shīʿites through the Nusayris (still extant, of course, in Syria). He provides the reader with invaluable historiographical materials gleaned from heresiographers and, of greater import, examines and translates into German

[5] Heinz Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis: Die Extreme Schīʿa und die ʿAlawiten* (Zurich and Munich, 1982).

the major texts of the various groups themselves. In spite of its signal importance, Halm's book does not address certain major historical, sociological, or political issues surrounding these sects. One of the most useful book-length treatments of the sects is still the Ph.D. dissertation of the late W. W. Rajkowski, which unfortunately has remained unpublished and which suffers from a lack of systematic comparison of the source materials, as well as a failure to adequately explore the intellectual relationships among the groups.[6] In addition, it is dated in some respects with regard to the sources the author utilized. In spite of all of this, it remains one of the clearest, most detailed, and most coherently organized examinations of not only the four sects relevant to the present volume, but, indeed, of early Shīʿism in Iraq generally. S. H. M. Jafri's *Origins and Early Development of Shīʿite Islam* contains mention of the groups but only as they related to the ʿAlids and only in a fashion calculated to minimize their importance and to distance them from moderate Shīʿism.[7]

Another brief but well-formulated treatment of at least two of the four sects can be found in Wadād al-Qādī's definitive study of the rebellion of al-Mukhtār and the rise of the Kaisāniyya Shīʿa. Al-Qādī conceives of the sects she examines as branches or offshoots of the Kaisāniyya, and, even though valid in at least one case, this approach does not take into account the original ideas of the four groups and the ways in which they differed from the partisans of Mukhtār.[8]

Among the books mentioning the four sects, Henri Laoust's study of what he refers to as "schisms" in Islam does little more than summarize their ideas in passing and so is of little use to the serious investigator of their historical role.[9] W. Montgomery

[6] W. W. Rajkowski, "Early Shīʿism in Iraq," Ph.D. diss. (London University, 1955).
[7] S. Husain M. Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shīʿite Islam* (London, 1979).
[8] Wadād al-Qādī, *al-Kaisāniyya fī Taʾrīkh wa al-Adab* (Beirut, 1974).
[9] Henri Laoust, *Les Schismes dans l'Islam* (Paris, 1965).

Watt's *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* has a section on the groups, but it is short and seems to add little to his earlier treatment of Umayyad Shīʿism in an article mentioned later in this chapter.[10] Moojan Momen offers some interesting and useful remarks in his large synthesis, *An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam*, cited previously, but his treatment is brief, centers upon Islamic conceptual categories, such as *Ghulāt* ("extremists"), and thereby fails to address the sociopolitical aspects of the sects. As the important article of Wadād al-Qādī demonstrates, the term "*Ghulāt*," indicating extremism or exaggeration, was a fluid one for Islamic authors and could mean different things in different accounts.[11] For this reason, the term "*Ghulāt*" in this study will be used to indicate sects possessing at least one of the following characteristics: deification or supernatural status of ʿAlī and other Shīʿite *Imāms*, belief in transmigration of souls, the concept of God becoming incarnate in any given person, and the expectation that a person will experience reincarnation.

In an important study of the spiritual and esoteric nature of the early Shīʿite *Imāms*, Mohammad Alī Amīr-Moezzi refers marginally to some of these groups but, interestingly enough, seems to use primarily research that I had published some years ago. The same secondary treatment is true of an outstanding study of the relationship between Jewish and Shīʿite sectarian movements, published by Steven Wasserstrom in 1995. Wasserstrom's book, incidentally, is an intriguing examination of comparative religious techniques and the influence religions can have on one another. The crucial concept of the *Mahdī* (saviour figure), which plays a central role in Shīʿism generally, is treated with great insight and depth by Abdulaziz Sachedina, in his work

[10] W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973).

[11] Wadād al-Qādī, "The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya," in *Akten des VII. Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft* (Göttingen, 1974), 295–319.

cited previously, but he addresses the issue for later, Twelver, thought using classical Shīʿite texts, and therefore sheds no real light upon how the four sects and other early groups understood the concept. Other brief remarks about these groups are to be found in the work of Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shīʿite Islam: Abū Jaʿfar ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmite Shīʿite Thought*. Finally, among books and monographs, I would like to take special note of the as-yet-unpublished dissertation of L. N. Takim, which, though devoted to an investigation of the early Shīʿite *Rijal*, refers in a few places to individuals associated with extremist Shīʿite sects. It is to be hoped that this important study will soon appear in print.[12]

An examination of the periodical literature also offers a number of worthwhile, albeit limited, studies, but in at least some cases one encounters problems of narrow scope and peripheral treatment. Probably the best short study of these extremist sects is the second part of a two-article series by Heinz Halm, which appeared in *Der Islam* in 1981. In essence, however, it is a summary minus translations of his already-cited volume on Islamic gnosis, which appeared the following year. In 1984, Mohamed Rekaya examined the groups briefly in an important article devoted to the so-called *Khurramite* movements active in early ʿAbbāsid Iran. His remarks, however, were taken largely from my own published studies. In the next year, Steven Wasserstrom contributed a stimulating, award-winning essay to the journal *History of Religions*, which treated the gnostic features of al-Mughīra ibn Saʿīd's

[12] Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*, trans. David Streight (Albany, N.Y., 1994); Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton N.J., 1995); Abdulaziz Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*; Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shiʿite Islam: Abu Jaʿfar ibn Qiba al-Razi and His Contribution to Imamite Shiʿite Thought* (Princeton, 1993); L. N. Takim, "The *Rijal* of the Shīʿi *Imāms* as depicted in *Imāmi* Biographical Literature," Ph.D. diss. (London University, SOAS, 1990).

teachings and showed how they were rejected by the community. This remains one of the best studies of any *Ghulāt* group down to the present.[13]

In addition to these more recent essays, there are several older periodical treatments that continue, in my opinion, to be of great merit and usefulness. Probably one of the best of these is the study published by Israel Friedlaender more than seventy years ago in the commentary to his translation of Ibn Hazm's treatise on the Shīʿites. This commentary is cited elsewhere and referred to on a number of occasions in the following pages. It is seen to be of particular value in suggesting possible origins of important concepts associated with the four sects and other early Shīʿite circles.

One of the most stimulating analyses of the nature and classification of the groups is to be found in Sabatino Moscati's "Per una Storia dell' Antica Sīʿa," which was published in 1955. The article begins with an excellent discussion of the sources. The author points out the problems involved in the use of those works treating Islamic heresies. The main difficulties, he suggests, are the obvious prejudices of the Muslim authors against "heretical" groups, their resort to stereotypes or clichés in presenting the doctrines of the heretics, and the chronological confusion arising from the arrangement of the heresies by grade rather than time period or stages of development.[14] He leaves little doubt, however, as to the necessity of using such sources carefully and systematically.

[13] Heinz Halm, "Das 'Buch der Schatten': Die Mufāddal-Tradition der *Gulāt* und die Ursprünge des Nusairiertums. II. Die Stoffe," *Der Islam*, 58 (1981), 15–86; Mohamed Rekaya, "Le *Khurramādin* et les mouvements khurramites sous les ʿAbbasides," *Studia Islamica*, 60 (1984), 5–57; Steven Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes: Mughīra ibn Saʿīd's Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of Its Rejection," *History of Religions*, 25 (1985), 1–29.

[14] Sabatino Moscati, "Per una Storia dell' Antica Sīʿa," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, XXX (1955), 253.

Moscati classifies the groups as being either primarily "religious" or "political." He suggests that movements emphasizing religious dogma included predominantly non-Arabs. Other groups that he considers to have been motivated mainly by political goals were, according to his line of reasoning, essentially Arab movements. The latter type, he argues, more often included ʿAlids in its positions of leadership or its ranks. The "religious-oriented" group, by contrast, was promoted by non-ʿAlids, who began by championing ʿAlid claims and ended by advancing their own claims to leadership.[15] Whereas there is some merit in this classification scheme, the research for this study demonstrates that the movements dealt with here were both "political" and "religious" and included both Arabs and non-Arabs. Moscati's twofold classification will not, therefore, be utilized in this book. Professor W. Montgomery Watt's study of Umayyad Shīʿism has proved to be of greater use in matters of detail and interpretation.[16] Generally, though, his treatment of the groups with which we are concerned is too brief to be overly helpful. His remarks about the Aramaean *Mawālī* are of interest, although the presence and role of the Aramaeans in Iraq has now been more rigorously examined by Michael Morony in his *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest.*[17] Watt's remarks about the South Arabian complexion of early Shīʿism are also in need of qualification, as this study indicates the presence of other elements in these movements.

The late Marshall G. S. Hodgon's investigation of the sectarian beginnings of Shīʿism has been valuable because of his statements concerning a possible relationship between the speculation of the early *Ghulāt* ("extremist" or "exaggerating") Shīʿites and that

[15] Ibid., 263–264.
[16] W. Montgomery Watt, "Shīʿism under the Umayyads," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1960), 158–172.
[17] Michael G. Morony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton N.J., 1984).

of the later Sūfis.[18] These suggestions have proved to be useful in tracing the impact of the groups studied here and will be referred to again.

The books and articles just mentioned are the only noteworthy treatments of the early Shī`ite extremists that have appeared to date. Other works have mentioned them briefly or given a synopsis of their beliefs without, however, examining them closely. Furthermore, and more importantly, no one has investigated the four groups upon which this study is concentrated within the framework of millenarian sectarianism. Hopefully, the present treatment will provide the detailed examination heretofore lacking.

The transliteration system is that employed by most English-language journals of Islamic studies at present, especially the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Technical names and personal names are rendered within the strictures of this system, whereas place names such as Mecca or Medina are instead spelled in accordance with current common English usage.

[18] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shī`a Become Sectarian," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 75 (1955), 1–13.