

Agents of the Hidden Imam

In 874 CE, the eleventh Imam died and the Imami community splintered. The institutions of the Imamate were maintained by the dead Imam's agents, who asserted they were in contact with a hidden twelfth Imam. This was the beginning of "Twelver" Shi'ism. Edmund Hayes provides an innovative approach to exploring early Shi'ism, moving beyond doctrinal history to provide an analysis of the socio-political processes leading to the canonization of the Occultation of the twelfth Imam. Hayes shows how the agents cemented their authority by reproducing the physical signs of the Imamate, including protocols of succession, letters, and alms taxes. Four of these agents were ultimately canonized as "envoys" but traces of earlier conceptions of authority remain embedded in the earliest reports. Hayes dissects the complex and contradictory Occultation narratives to show how, amid the claims of numerous actors, the institutional positioning of the envoys allowed them to assert a quasi-Imamic authority in the absence of an Imam.

Edmund Hayes is a researcher at Radboud University, Nijmegen. He has authored numerous articles at the intersection between the intellectual, religious, and social history of early Islam, including on the institutions of the Shi'i Imamate, Islamic revenues, charity and taxation, excommunication, ethnicity, and gender and sexuality.

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Agents of the Hidden Imam

Forging Twelver Shi'ism, 850–950 CE

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For Mum and Dad

Yet som men say in many partys of Inglonde that Kynge Arthure ys nat dede, but had by the wyll of Oure Lorde Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall com agayne, and he shall wyne the Holy Crosse. Yet I woll nate say that hit shall be so; but rather I wolde sey, here in thys worlde he changed his lyff. And many men say that there ys written upon the tumber this [vers]: HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS [Here lies Arthur, king once, king to be].

Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page viii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xii
Introduction	1
1 The Rise of the Agents in the Late Imamate (830–874 CE)	28
2 The Crisis before the Crisis: The Feud between Imamic Contenders and the Power of the Agents	42
3 Crisis! The Mother, the Brother, the Concubine, and the Politics of Inheritance	52
4 The Agents of the <i>Nāḥiya</i> in the Era of Perplexity	80
5 The Creation of an Envoy: The Rise of Abū Ja‘far al-‘Amrī	120
6 Rise and Fall: Ibn Rawḥ, Shalmaghānī, and the Rise and Fall of the Envoyship	172
Conclusion	216
<i>Bibliography</i>	222
<i>Index</i>	242

Figures

1 Dirham naming of ‘Alī al-Riḍā as heir to ‘Abbasid caliph Ma’ mūn	<i>page</i> 34
2 The wise king behind a curtain	44
3 A funeral	54
4 Modern location of house of ‘Askarī Imams in Samarra	66
5 Early claims to represent the Imamate	79
6 Dancing girls from Samarra palace	102
7 Third-/ninth-century Arabic letter with its response written overleaf	128
8 Lamp	134
9 Seal	180
10 The execution of Ḥallāj in Baghdad	192

Tables

1 The canonical sequence of the twelve Imams of the Twelver Shi'a	<i>page 3</i>
2 Ṭūsi's taxonomy of praised and censured agents, envoys, and false Gates	11
3 Agents who saw the Imam, as reported by Muḥammad al-Kūfī	88
4 Reports about Ibn Mahziyār	136
5 The incarnation of the divine pentad proposed by Shalmaghānī by 312/924	203

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xi

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Abbreviations

In the notes:

- EIr* *Encyclopaedia Iranica*
EI2 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition
EI3 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third edition
 Lane Edward William Lane, *An Arabic–English Lexicon*, 8 vols.
 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–93)

In translations from the Arabic:

- AJ *‘Azza wa-jalla*, “He is glorified and great.” Used of God.
 AS *‘Alayhi al-salām*, “upon him be peace.” Used of an Imam, or
 Imams if in the plural.
 QAR *Qaddasa Allāh rūḥahu*, “may God sanctify his soul” (or dual
 or plural forms). Used for the envoys.
 RA *Raḥimahu Allāh*, “may God have mercy upon him” (or dual or
 plural forms). Used for a venerated figure who has passed
 away.
 RAA *Raḍiya Allāh ‘anhu*, “may God be pleased with him” (or dual
 or plural forms). Used for agents, envoys, scholars, and other
 pious, venerated followers and companions of the Imams.
 RATAA *Raḍiya Allāh ta’ālā ‘anhu wa-ardāhu*, “may God most high be
 pleased with him and grant him contentment.” Used for
 agents, envoys, scholars, and other pious, venerated followers
 and companions of the Imams.

List of Abbreviations

xiii

- SAA *Ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi* or *Ṣalawāt Allāh ‘alayhi*, “may God bless him” or “God’s blessings be upon him.” Usually used for a prophet.
- SAAA *Ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa-‘ālihi*, “may God pray for him and his family.” Used for the Prophet Muḥammad.
- SAAS *Ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa-sallam*, “may God pray for him and grant him peace.” Used for the Prophet Muḥammad.
- T *Ta’ālā*, “He is most high.” Used for God.

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